

## Modern Phoenix Week Focuses on Sunnyslope

Written by Written by David M. Brown

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This year's Modern Phoenix Week, April 9–17, travels to Sunnyslope and Scottsdale.



*Built in 1945, the Vasan-Lobo home was purchased by the current owners in 2000. They completed additions and remodeling by January 2009, including passive solar design, rammed-earth walls, reuse of block and wood framing and adding old denim for insulation. Aaron Kimberlin image*

"Sunnyslope's challenging elevations and gorgeous views have attracted many talented individuals to create unique statements in their homes." —Alison King, Modern Phoenix

The ticketed April 17 home tour features a dozen homes in Sunnyslope, the north Phoenix community that began as a health refuge in the early 20th century and developed into a thriving community with many fine mid-20th-century homes.

The home tour and related expo and lectures in Scottsdale are a partnership of the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (SMoCA) and Modern Phoenix, the highly regarded Web site-based network of designers, educators, writers and design enthusiasts who celebrate Phoenix midcentury-modern architectural style.

The previous day, April 16, SMoCA is hosting the expo and lectures inside the lobby of the Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts building. Other related activities take place throughout the Phoenix area during the preceding week and the month of April.

The 7th annual Modern Phoenix event is also supported by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, notes Alison King, who, with husband Matthew, began [www.modernphoenix.net](http://www.modernphoenix.net) to chronicle the city's endangered postwar buildings, promote discussion forums and coordinate architectural events.

Sunnyslope is 100 years old this year — founded by William R. Norton. "While out on a buggy ride in the desert, one of his daughters was looking at the sun shining on the 'pretty sunny slope,'" explains Vivia Strang, CPM, National Register coordinator for the State Historic Preservation Office in Phoenix. "Mr. Norton liked it and named the area Sunny Slope." After World War II, the community became one word, she adds.

Norton platted the first subdivision in 1911 — the Sunny Slope Subdivision. Its boundaries were Central Avenue on the west, Dunlap Avenue on the north, Third Street to the east and Alice Avenue on the south, Strang notes.



*'The vision for our pad was to design a home that has life and can breathe just as we do and can shape our day-to-day experiences,' says one owner, an architect. 'We wanted a home that had an external appearance of being a vertical extension of the desert landscape and internally had minimalism as its core value.' Aaron Kimberlin image*

"The community hosts a diverse landscape of architecture, from tuberculosis cabins in the valleys to multi-story contemporary masterpieces in the mountains," she explains. "In addition to the prewar examples, one of the most defining characteristics is the extremely small postwar tract homes that were built around the health complex of the hospital."

People seeking a cure from tuberculosis and asthma first settled the area. "It was hoped that the dry, clean, desert air would cure their illnesses," Strang explains. "After WWII, it became one of the Valley's fastest growing areas, with subdivisions replacing tuberculosis camps and middle-class houses pushing out the shacks and tents."

Midcentury-modern architects drawn to Sunnyslope include Leslie Mahoney, Ralph Haver, Ed Varney and Paul Christian Yeager. Today, the area's challenging elevations and hillside views have attracted architects and designers such as Marlene Imirzian, James Trahan, Jeffrey Frost, Wendell Burnette and Matthew Trzebiatowski to build their homes and design for others.

Many of these historic and contemporary properties, with sustainable features and modifications to today's lifestyles, are part of this year's tour. They include the Vasan-Lobo home, incorporating rammed-earth walls, solar orientation and rainwater harvesting in the original 1911 subdivision, the Frost home, a Haver renovation featuring Energy Star products such as cool roof coating, xeriscaping and intensive recycling efforts and the Gonshorowski home with low-water landscaping.

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Businesses are also participating, such as Michael Keele's Central Slope eco+design+market which will be the second home tour check-in and also hosting an after-hours party.

"Each year, we try to feature both restorations and renovations of midcentury homes," King explains. "Many of us are struggling with finding a balance between preservation and necessary upgrades to keep this generation of midcentury homes green and livable for our contemporary lifestyle."

In the 1950s, for example, people didn't need a home office or media room — a necessity for today's design professionals. "It's important to see how other people have accomplished a balance and take ideas and inspiration," she says. "In the tours, we try to show a good range of ideas at multiple price points by both professionals and weekend warriors, so there's always a little something for everyone."



*The 1959 ranch home was remodelled with mid-century modern themes. The exterior block was sandblasted, retucked and sealed, then combined with iron and other metals. Matt Gonshorowski has converted the home into an oasis of low-maintenance landscaping, with every plant placed and nurtured to display its uniqueness. Aaron Kimberlin image*

SMoCA is hosting the free lectures and expo April 16 at SCPA: "Research your Midcentury Modern Home Using Primary Sources," 11 a.m.– 12 p.m., by John Jacquemart; "Nominate your Home, Neighborhood or Building for the Register of Historic Properties," 12–1 p.m., Vivia Strang; "Roadside Neon of Central Arizona," 12:30–1:30 p.m., Marshall Shore; "The Trouble with Teardowns in Arcadia," 1:30 –2:30 p.m., Roger Brevoort; "Modern Scottsdale," 2:30 –3:30 p.m., Doug Sydnor, with a 3:40 p.m. book signing; and at 4– 5:30 p.m., "Recent Past Preservation Movement: A State of the Nation Address," by Christine French of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Among the other programs during the week is "Modern Phoenicians II: Extended Remix," April 15, 6–10 p.m., an exhibition by students, alumni, faculty and professionals at the Art Institute of Phoenix gallery on Roosevelt Street. The school is also hosting a First Friday exhibition of artwork on urban themes, April 4.

Earlier that week, April 12, at 7 p.m., SMoCA, with AIA Arizona, is hosting the annual "Slide Slam" event, as a part of Modern Phoenix Week and in celebration of National Architecture Week. The program features John Kane, FAIA, LEED AP, Architekton; Brent Kendle, AIA, Kendle Design Collaborative; Michelle Ray, AIA and John Tran, AIA, Omni Plan; and Phil Weddle, AIA, Weddle Gilmore.

King notes that Sunnyslope was also chosen for this year's tour because it represents one of many "unprotected" Valley neighborhoods.

"Our midcentury culture is extremely vulnerable as there are currently no organized efforts to designate these neighborhoods in the same way that districts like Encanto or Coronado have," she explains. "There are no implemented restoration guidelines or tax incentives to restore. And, it is going to be a long, long time before the city of Phoenix is going to be able to assist in the research studies necessary to apply for historic designations."

As a result, Modern Phoenix hopes the Sunnyslope tour, and future events, will provide a dialogue between homeowners instead of relying on city incentives. "We try to illuminate the inherent benefits of restoration and adaptation from a practical and aesthetic standpoint," she adds.

The April 16 expo and lectures are free, but a ticket must be purchased through the SCPA Box Office for the April 17 Modern Phoenix Home Tour. Those tickets are limited to 800 — and the event sells out annually. The cost is \$20 for SMoCA members and \$25 for nonmembers. No tickets will be sold on site in Sunnyslope prior to or the day of the tour. Other Valleywide events occur in conjunction with Modern Phoenix Week: See the Web site for details: [www.modernphoenixweek.com](http://www.modernphoenixweek.com).