

Oak Hills residents take pride in Rummer-designed homes scattered through the midcentury neighborhood

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By **Emily E. Smith, The Oregonian**



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Charlotte Awe sits in the atrium of her 1967 Oak Hills house. The atrium, which serves as the entrance and center of Awe's home, was originally uncovered. After snow and rain fell into the middle of her home, Awe said, she asked builder Robert Rummer to add a cover. Awe's home is one of eight that will be featured on a tour of Rummer houses in May, a fundraiser for the neighborhood's nomination to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

BETHANY -- Architecture aficionados will **traipse through Oaks Hills** next month examining eight homes built by Robert Rummer, known for his distinct, midcentury modern style.

The **Historic Preservation League of Oregon's** tour of Rummer homes will show a sampling of the 29 houses nestled throughout the 650-home community.

The tour will benefit the league and Oak Hills' nomination to be listed on the **National Register of Historic Places**. Still shy of 50 years old, the neighborhood is young by historic standards. But neighbors say Oak Hills is unique, and it needs to be preserved.

A 1960s planned community, Oak Hills homes are scattered around an elementary school, church,

recreation center, pool and tennis courts, with green spaces and walking paths intertwined.

It's a modest neighborhood, lacking in extravagant homes but abundant in manicured lawns and neighbors out walking the **2-mile stretch of sidewalk** that circles the small community.

And taped to windows all over the neighborhood are fliers bearing the mantra residents adopted during months of rallying against **the county's road-widening proposal** for nearby Northwest Bethany Boulevard: "This place matters."

If Oak Hills becomes a historic district, preservation league Executive Director Peggy Moretti said, it could stand to gain federal protection from decisions like the Bethany Boulevard expansion, **approved by county commissioners in February**, which will cut

Tour of Rummer houses

Where: Oak Hills, a 1960s planned community; enter at Northwest 153rd Avenue and Northwest Cornell Road.

What: Tour eight houses built by Robert Rummer, view the Oak Hills

into several backyards.

The pride neighbors take in Oak Hills is their source of passion, Moretti said, demonstrated in their battle with the county and their pursuit of historic status.

The 29 houses built by Rummer in the late 1960s, a then-local architect, make it particularly appealing for historic preservation, Moretti said.

The homes have a distinct look, similar to Joseph Eichler's midcentury modern homes in California, marked by flat, low-pitch roofs, an open design and single-story homes with atriums and vaulted ceilings. (See *Rummer video below.*)



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Charlotte Awe's Oak Hills home was designed in 1967 by Robert Rummer, an Oregon architect known for his midcentury modern homes similar to Joseph Eichler's California houses.

Forty-three years ago, Charlotte Awe, 76, and her family spotted a model Rummer home on a drive through Oak Hills and decided right then they wanted to live there.

"We went home that night and called Rummer on the phone and he said, 'Go pick out a lot,' " she said.

In June 1967, Awe moved into the four-bedroom house that she's lived in ever since and kept in the same style. Awe loves her home's design, with a plant-filled atrium as its entrance and center, leading to several rooms through sliding glass doors.

"The atrium I'm in love with and always have been," Awe said.

But for Awe and other Oak Hills residents, the neighborhood is special for more than its pocketful of Rummer homes.

Darla Castagno, 75, has lived in Oak Hills for more than 40 years. Since then, she's lived in two Oak Hills homes and three years ago began spearheading a project to get the neighborhood on the National Register of Historic Places.

There are other planned communities in the metro area, of course, but Castagno and other neighbors believe Oak Hills is different. They say its amenities and close-knit sense of community set it apart.

"There's not another one in the Pacific Northwest," Castagno said. "We may be the first in the United States of America."

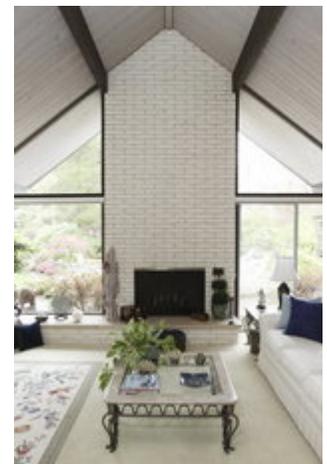
For years, Awe said, several Rummer homeowners in the neighborhood have opened their homes to give neighbors a chance to see how they're styling, updating and fixing their homes.

church and community center, hear a lecture on midcentury modern architecture and attend a question-and-answer session with Rummer.

When: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, May 21

Tickets: Purchase tickets **online** or call 503-243-1923.

Cost: \$40 per person



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The living room of Awe's home features a vaulted

This year, the open houses will benefit a larger cause. If not for federal historic preservation, then at least for the admiring comments that Oak Hills neighbors have murmured among themselves for decades.

"Finally," Castagno said, "somebody figured out that these Rummors are something kind of special."

-- **Emily E. Smith**

ceiling and lots of glass, classic markers of the mid-century modern houses built by Rummer. Awe has kept her home in its original 1960s style with the exception of a couple of updates, like the interior wood paneling, which she traded for painted walls.