FUTURISTIC HOUSES

Katya Tylevich goes on a ‘futuristic concept’ binge through Southern California, meets three passionate homeowners and talks to one very passionate architect.

Text Katya Tylevich / Photos Alexei Tylevich
But I know there’s no such thing as an unbuildable site: Ray tells me by phone. ‘Later, the Zoning Department told me the house looked too unusual. You have to understand, La Jolla is a very conservative community. I did get threats, some not so subtle, from moneyed interests who were none too happy with what I was doing. I was associated with advanced thinking.’

Indeed, the house is the architectural translation of an advanced moment in Ray’s life. At age 14, the architect saw a UFO over his home in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. ‘A silent, silver craft,’ says Ray. ‘Aerodynamic, stretched, cylindrical. Immediately, I felt the transcendent quality of a high-technology concept.’ The feeling lingered.

Ray lived and worked in his Silver Ship for 25 years, but after his wife died and their three children moved out, he sold the house. He no longer considers the structure his – not least because of changes the current owners made to it. Meanwhile, issued one-liners like ‘Not for the faint-hearted or conventional’ and ‘Dare to be different’.

Ted Spyropoulos, a painting contractor who lives with Spyropoulos in Silver Ship. ‘It takes a special person to live here. This house is extreme,’ Haeg concedes. ‘This house is so dominant; you can’t ever hope to remake it in your own vision,’ he says. ‘Its personality is too powerful. What I’ve done to the place has simply melted into it.’ He’s referring to the sleeping hole (now a ‘guest bedroom’) in the cave, the wall of bookshelves, the distinctive palettes marking each floor (green, brown, blue – from bottom to top) and the Dutch doors. ‘I like the contrast of old-fashioned doors in a primitive-charm-futuristic house,’ he says.

Spyropoulos realizes he and his former professor do not see eye to eye on many changes he’s made. ‘I have to think practically. I’m so happy I didn’t sell it,’ he says now. ‘I can’t imagine going through with it. I can’t just hand it over to anyone. Then again, not just anyone could live here. The dome is probably the most normal part of the house, and everything gets weirder from there. People are curious, but few can face the reality of not having air conditioning, or a heater). Ray’s house guests included Paolo Soleri and Bruce Goff, names synonymous with architectural mad science.

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Ray, a 12-m-long x 3-m-high trusses ‘that form wooden floor panels to withstand earthquakes, included a lamella roof, extra-thick interlocked with the vertically designed tensile structure for good reason,’ he says. Ray’s experiments were published and exhibited in nine countries important building in La Jolla. Built at a price $140 million, it is perhaps the most expensive house ever sold. It inspired innovation, this ‘humble materials’ like corrugated metal, re-sawn cedar, and Plexiglas. A cantilevered three-car parking deck sits an upward hike away from the lightweight vessel. Inside, the steps have no railings, and under Ray’s ownership the doors were all oval and most walls were painted deep blue ‘a peaceful colour’. The house has no central heating or air conditioning, relying instead on a passive system (and the occasional space heater). Ray’s house guests included Paolo Soleri and Bruce Goff, names synonymous with architectural mad science.

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01 The dome is now used as the master bedroom.
02 Kitchen and dining room.
03 A hole in the wall of the cave leads to a guest bedroom.
04 The lower part of the house has a cave-like appearance.