

Weston is home to one of three U.S. houses designed by modernist Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

By **Jennifer Carmichael**, *Correspondent*

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The Morris Greenwald House in Weston, Connecticut was designed by noted modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in 1963. The property sits on more than 5 acres on the Saugatuck River.

Bryan Haeffele / Hearst Connecticut Media

Living in a historic property worthy of preservation is nothing new to Richard and Jane Wolf.

The couple lived within [Radburn](#), a planned community in Bergen County, New Jersey, designated a [National Historic Landmark](#), before buying [one of three single-family houses](#) in the United States designed by modernist architect [Ludwig Mies van der Rohe](#) in Weston. (The other two are in Illinois.) Both homes the Wolfs lived in share a similarity of being surrounded by green space; the development offered parks and gardens, while the Mies park-like property boasts an impressive 5.4 acres on the Saugatuck River. But moving from a traditional house close to neighboring homes to one with wall-to-wall windows nestled away and hidden from the road was very different.



The Morris Greenwald House in Weston, Connecticut was designed by noted modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in 1963. The primary bedroom is shown.
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"When we decided to move, we were considering Westchester and Connecticut because I had moved my office to midtown, and there wasn't a convenient commute from New Jersey," notes Wolf, who has an architecture license but made his living in the construction business in New York City. "We saw the house advertised in the *New York Times* magazine section and decided to visit it. The overriding reason for purchasing the property was the site."

Built in 1963, the 1,800-square-foot, single-level, flat-roofed house remained unchanged in size when the Wolfs bought it in 1987. It was named after Morris Greenwald, the brother of Herbert Greenwald, a Chicago real estate developer who had a "world famous partnership with architect Mies van Der Rohe," as the Greenwald Company states. In fact, the home's aluminum window wall units are left over from Mies' great apartment project on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago.



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German-born Mies designed buildings in Europe like the Barcelona Pavilion and was named director of the Bauhaus, "the renowned German school of experimental art and design" in 1930, according to the [Mies van der Rohe society](#). When he moved to the United States, he became an important figure in Chicago architecture, designing the aforementioned Lake Shore Drive Apartments and the Chicago Federal Center, among others. He also designed important buildings in other American cities, including the Seagram Building in New York City and the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library in Washington, D.C.



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A basic rectangular shape, Weston's Morris Greenwald House is made of steel, brick and glass with a floor made of concrete and a flat roof made of asphalt. The design incorporates a stepped grade, with the foundation raised just above the terrain. This adds visual interest and better views of the surrounding landscape through the home's broad expanses of glass.



The family room at The Morris Greenwald House in Weston, Connecticut. The house was designed by noted modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in 1963.
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"We don't have window treatments on any of the glass walls except for the bedrooms," says Wolf, the third owner of the house. "The indoor spaces integrate with the beautiful landscape. Glass, however, is very dark at night because it doesn't reflect the interior light, but this is something that you learn to live with."

While the couple was attracted to the natural surroundings, they also appreciated the two free-standing structures connected with a screen on the property — two guest bedrooms and a bathroom with a Japanese soaking tub, shower and sauna — added by the house's second owner in 1981. Architect Peter Gluck, principal of [GLUCK+](#), was tapped to design the buildings.



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"The idea was to create something sympathetic to the original but not copy or destroy it," notes Gluck, who has been working in residential and commercial design for 60 years.



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Before purchasing the house, Wolf contacted Gluck to hear his thoughts on whether he could sensitively modify the original house to be a comfortable place to raise his family. At the time, it was a bit small for him, his wife, and two young children; Gluck agreed that he could do it. So, the Wolfs hired him to design an addition to the original structure and reconfigure some of its interior spaces.



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"I didn't want to lose Mies in the reconstruction," notes Wolf, who commends Gluck for his design prowess. "Because so often, if you see some of the mid-century modern homes that have been reconstructed and added onto, you find the architecture is lost. I didn't want that to happen. I wanted to be able to read Mies and his original design."



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"I was reluctant at first," notes Gluck. "I didn't want to touch the iconic Mies house and there are many architects who were appalled that I would consider doing so. However, ultimately, I figured someone else would eventually do it if I didn't. So, while it was a difficult project, I did my best to have the addition touch the original house at one spot. I designed it with a different window glazing system, but one that would be very sympathetic to the original."



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The original house offered two smaller bedrooms for each of the Wolfs' children and a primary bedroom, along with two bathrooms, a kitchen, and living area. The addition brought 900 extra square feet to the home, and two thirds of the existing spaces were reconfigured.



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"It's a demanding house because it's open without much separation between spaces," says Wolf. "So you don't have a lot of acoustic privacy." The bedrooms now have doors, but he says in the original design, they did not.



The Morris Greenwald House in Weston, Connecticut was designed by noted modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in 1963. Pictured is the formal dining room.
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The couple also wanted to open parts of the house to views of the river, as walls were in the way. Notes Wolf, "When Mies designed the house, his budget was \$25,000. If he had a larger budget, he may have designed a more open floor plan."



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"Early Modernism brought in new material technologies and construction methods, in particular the design opportunities with glass," notes Gluck. "Historically, the Mies house couldn't be more important. Many significant buildings have been destroyed. But now there are movements that recognize the value of saving notable examples of our past."

"It's a special place," says Wolf. "We have enjoyed living in the community of Weston and our house for the past 37 years."

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