John deKoven Hill and the Corbett House

Hillside Modern Architect Forum, Cincinnati Chapter, Kyle Kerr, Kimberley Hill, Dr. Carl Abbott, Mary Ann Lindemann, Kimberley Hill, Photographer Kimberley Hill, Dr. Carl Abbott, Mary Ann Lindemann, Kimberley Hill, Photographer Kimberley Hill

John deKoven Hill (1923-88), a Texas native though-and-and Walter Peter Wenger, designed a large-scale residence for Dr. Robert Corbett in the Cincinnati suburb of Indian Hill, Ohio, in the mid-1950s. Hill, Cincinnati Chapter, Kyle Kerr and Kimberley Hill, Photographer Kimberley Hill, Dr. Carl Abbott, Mary Ann Lindemann,

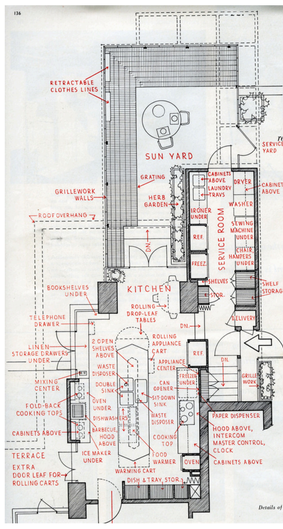
Corbett House, detail of aluminum screen motif. Photograph by Elizabeth Meyer, 2008. From the University of Cincinnati Digital Collections & Repositories @UC Libraries

The kitchen is the most dramatic but least Wrightian space of the house. Wright's later kitchens tended to be small "work spaces," but the Corbett's kitchen is a vast, blue, Formica-clad space with sloped ceilings, skylights, and the latest electronics (cook-tops, waste disposals, can openers, freezers, dishwashers, ice-makers, and more). It is the technological "showcase" of the house and Ralph Corbett's major advertisement for NuTone products.

Corbett House kitchen. Photographs by Ezra Stoller ©Esto. *House Beautiful*, February 1960

The kitchen is treated as equal to the public spaces of the house; perhaps the Corbetts sometimes used it themselves, but during entertainments it probably remained private, staffed by cooks, maids, and servers. Despite its contradictions, however, the Corbett House kitchen is a precursor of today's lavish "entertaining kitchens."

The Corbett House, as featured in *House Beautiful*, offered middle class readers voyeuristic views into the Corbetts' upper-class lifestyle, enhanced by Hill's sophisticated spatial layering and Ezra Stoller's alluring photographs.



Corbett House, kitchen plan with electronic appliances called out. *House Beautiful*, February 1960

Wright's school at Taliesin continued the 19th-century tradition of architectural education by apprenticeship. John deKoven Hill epitomized the "loyal apprentice" who, with the exception of his "assignment" at *House Beautiful* magazine, remained a part of the Taliesin team for his entire career. The Corbett House is the single, independent commission where his architectural "voice" is evident in a complete building.

Corbett House, south terraces with deteriorating American Olean tile. Photograph by Alice Weston, ca. 1990s From the University of Cincinnati Digital Collections & Repositories @UC Libraries

Cincinnati architect Thomas Landise, Jr. supervised construction of the Corbett House and later returned to make modifications, including an enlargement of the dining room. Patricia Corbett lived in the house until her death in 2008, after which it was sold and remodeled. Chuck Lohre (an owner of Wright's Boulter House) rescued the futuristic kitchen, which remains in storage.

The Corbett House is unique: a luxurious, Wrightian-style, organic residence designed by Taliesin protege John deKoven Hill to accommodate multiple and complex programmatic requirements. It served Elizabeth Gordon as a product-placement haven for *House Beautiful* advertisers; it served J. Ralph Corbett as a showcase for NuTone electronics; it served Patricia Corbett as an entertaining center for advancing her musical ambitions and her philanthropic role in Cincinnati; it allowed the Corbetts to simultaneously display and store their extensive art collections; it functioned as a home on a day-to-day basis; and its effective spatial layering made for brilliant publication photographs. At the Corbett House, John deKoven Hill gave everyone involved with it everything that they desired.

Corbett House. Photograph by Ezra Stoller ©Esto. *House Beautiful*, February 1960

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