

## River City Commons Association RCCA Original Architecture

This document provides an historical perspective of the builder's original vision for the architectural style of our community, River City Commons Association. It also contains descriptions of both the original building and landscape architectural components of our Streng Bros. development. In order to maintain architectural integrity overtime with compatible changes, it is important that we understand the original architecture. You can use this information to restore your house to its original or near-original appearance, if desired.

### **Modernistic Architecture: the Builders' Vision**

The style of our houses is called "modern" or "modernistic" architecture. Modernism became a popular architectural design movement from the late 1800's to 1984. It started in Europe and the United States then spread throughout the world. Architects working in this design style typically:

- Adopted the principle that the materials and function determine the resulting design,
- Adopted glass, steel and concrete as preferred materials (in addition to traditional wood),
- Used machine-made elements and mass-production (as opposed to hand-crafting),
- Rejected ornamentation,
- Simplified form and eliminated unnecessary detail,
- Rejected historical styles as a source of architectural form.

The clean *modernistic* lines of Joseph Eichler's San Francisco Bay Area homes featuring classic post and beam construction inspired brothers Jim and Bill Streng (homebuilders). A local architect, Carter Sparks had worked for the architectural firm that designed for Eichler. Streng Bros. Homes hired Sparks to bring a new interpretation of the *modernistic* home to the Central Valley.

Their new interpretation of *modernistic* architecture featured a "less is more" approach characterized by the architecture of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and the flowing interior spaces, projecting roofs and warm woodsy styles of Frank Lloyd Wright. Architects Louis Sullivan, and Greene and Greene also influenced Sparks. Our developer, Jim Streng, considers our

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architecture to be the type of modernistic design called "mid-century modern".

That is why the simple exteriors of our houses are not embellished with decorations, such as brick wainscoting, fake window shutters or curlicues. Our homes are horizontal in style with flat or low-pitched roofs. Some have bold exposed wood beams, wide fascia and overhangs. For the RCCA community, Streng Bros. Homes and Sparks used a standard color palette of muted earth tones for the exterior that has created a harmonious, blended look for our community. Their standard was to paint both half-plex units the same color so they would blend with each other instead of contrast or compete. The beauty of our home's *modernistic* architectural design is the simplicity of the exterior and the intended surprise with the interior.

Originally, brightly colored front doors on RCCA homes beckoned invitingly and teased the imagination of what is inside. When entering the home, one pleasantly confronted space and light from the open floor plans, high or vaulted ceilings, walls of glass windows and doors, and cathedral windows at the gables. Exposed aggregate in the entry, large skylights, earthen-floored wall-less atriums, and sliding glass doors opening onto backyard patios emphasized the merging of indoor and outdoor spaces.

Following his philosophy that "simplicity is the essence of good design", Sparks designed the RCCA community with high standards and Streng Bros. Homes made them affordable for homebuyers who love *modernistic* architectural design.

### House Styles

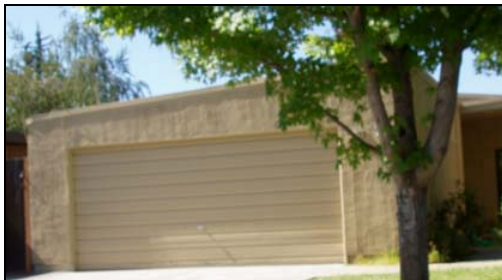
All units are one story. Almost all floor plans had great-rooms including kitchens and dining areas that faced the backyard but bedroom windows faced the front or side. Some front door entryways were located along the side of the house. Exterior house styles were designed with various optional features including:

- Half-plex or single family,
- T1-11 vertical wood siding or stucco exterior walls,

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- Roof lines with wide fascias, overhangs and exposed beams or narrower fascias; no overhangs and no beams,
- Garage or carport,
- Flat panel wooden door or glass sliding patio door,
- Vertical or horizontal front bedroom window, and
- Flat or slightly sloped front roof.

Although these pictures were taken almost thirty years after the community was developed, they show the original architectural features.



STYLE 1. Half-plex with raked stucco body; roofline with narrow fascia, no overhang and no exposed beams; sliding patio door (out of sight on right); (garage door is not original)



STYLE 2. Single family house with vertical wood siding body; wide fascia, overhang, and exposed beams; 2-car garage; sliding patio door

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STYLE 3. Single-family house with stucco siding; wide fascia, overhang, and exposed beams; horizontal bedroom window; (garage door is not original)



STYLE 4. Half-plex with vertical wood siding; wide fascia, overhang, and exposed beams; front door along left side; horizontal bedroom window; original garage door



STYLE 5. Half-plex with vertical wood siding; wide fascia, overhang and exposed beams; horizontal bedroom window; carport; slightly sloped roofline

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STYLE 6. Uniquely styled single-family house with split elevated front roofline; vertical wood siding; wide fascia, overhang and exposed beams; horizontal bedroom window



STYLE 7. Single-family house with vertical wood siding; wide fascia, overhang and exposed beams; unique in that it has both carport and garage and no front windows



STYLE 8. Half-plex with vertical wood siding; wide fascia, overhang and exposed beams; tall vertical bedroom window; flat roof; front door on right side

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STYLE 9. Half-plex on corner lot with stucco siding; wide fascia, overhang and exposed beams; tall vertical windows; both sloped and flat rooflines.

### **Gabled and Flat Roofs**

Original roofs were a combination of low-pitched gables and flat or slightly sloped roofs with or without deep overhangs. The ridgeline (peak) was perpendicular to the street. Flat and slightly sloped roofs were tar and gravel. Low-pitched gable roofs were asphalt shingled.

### **Gutters and Downspouts**

On flat roofs, there were no gutters; the downspouts went directly from the roof through the overhang. Gabled roofs had a gutter.

### **Skylights**

Skylights over the bathrooms, laundry room and atriums had square domes. Bathroom skylights were white. Atrium skylights were clear, white or bronzed.

### **Fascia, Beams and Overhangs**

Most rooflines had overhangs and wide fascia boards with exposed beams located under and beyond the overhangs. Except for support beams, most beams extend 2 feet or so in from the outside. Those units without overhangs had narrower fascia boards and no exposed beams.

### **Roof Area Equipment**

There were no antennas, solar panels or satellite dishes. A common TV antenna was located in the common area park with underground lines leading to each home. The obsolete antenna system was abandoned when the

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new technologies of cable and satellite service became available to individual homeowners.

### Utilities and Services

All electrical, phone and TV lines were underground with service boxes on the side of the house. Electricity was used for kitchen appliances unless otherwise ordered from the developer. Gas was used for hot water heaters and heating. Sewer lines were ABS from the house to the street. Sewer cleanout traps were located either near the house or in the easement.

### Mailboxes

Personal mailboxes were single or double metal boxes on a wooden post. They were removed when the Post Office provided more secure community mailboxes.

### Exterior Walls

Most exterior walls were Texture 1-11 (T1-11) board made of rough-sawn plywood sheets of Douglas fir, with vertical grooves to simulate an 8" wide board and batten pattern. Other houses had raked or sprayed stucco.

### Front Doors

Doors were solid core Douglas fir and the design was a simple flat panel painted in bright colors. Doors had brushed nickel door handles and separate deadbolt lock on one plate. Some sliding patio doors were also in front.



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### Garage Doors

Garage doors were made of the same T1-11 siding as exterior walls. They had no adornment, just silver-colored, locking handles. A few had small rectangular windows that were special ordered from the developer.



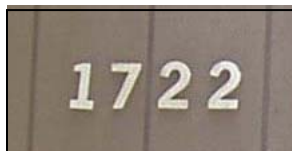
### House Lights

Lights were located near garage, front and back doors.



### House Numbers

Three inch tall house numbers were simple and white.



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## Windows and Patio Doors

Windows and patio doors were dark black-brown metal single hung frames with a narrow modern profile made by Blomberg Window Systems. Most vertical bedroom windows were about 3 feet by 7.5 feet with three sections; the middle section moved up. Horizontal bedroom windows had two sections with one section sliding open. There were narrow vertical windows running the height of the wooden front doors with two transom windows above. Some six-foot tall front patio sliding doors were in the front. There were no window boxes or shutters.

**Vertical bedroom window**



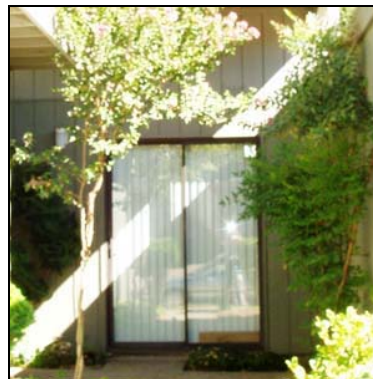
**Horizontal bedroom window**



**Front door transom and side windows**



**Front sliding patio door**



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### Paint Colors

The architect of RCC, Carter Sparks, strongly advocated the design philosophy, "Blend, not contrast". His original design called for exterior house colors in muted earth tones. Wood siding houses were in medium and dark shades and stucco houses were in subdued light colors. Fascia and beams were either darker than or the same color as the body of the house. In addition to downspouts, the wood strips framing the windows and garage doors were the same color as the body.

Half-plex units were painted matching colors for a blended, harmonious look. When two attached units are painted different colors, Sparks believed the contrasting colors compete with each other visually and give the overall building a non-cohesive, smaller appearance.

The exact identification of original house colors is not known. However, some original owners have always repainted to match the original. In 1992, the Association hired Sparks to provide us with a palette of compatible Olympic brand paint colors.

### Landscape

Streng Bros. Homes provided graded, bare soil for homeowners to plant as they saw fit. If a buyer requested it, they provided a tree. The only hardscapes were natural exposed aggregate driveways and walkways in the front and patios in the back. Jim Streng told us he regretted not landscaping the front yards so the neighborhood would have a cohesive look. He wished he had the foresight to put in landscaping restrictions such as this guideline provides.

### Fences

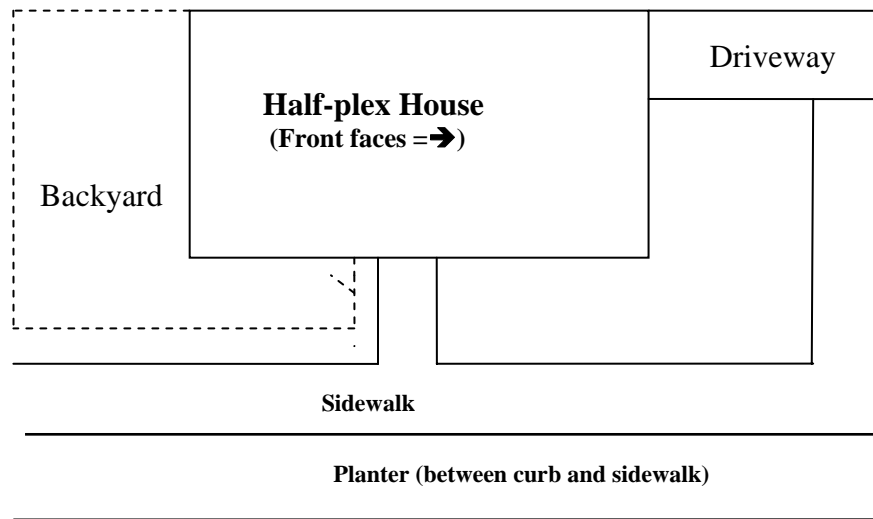
Fences enclosed backyards. Fences and gates varied in height up to six feet and were made of redwood tri-stakes. Fences were neither stained nor weatherproofed. All fence sections along an adjoining property line had either all-front or all-back fence panels facing the same way. Fences did not wrap around the front to form courtyards, storage areas or hide the front entrance walkways along the sides of the house unless the original owner requested it from the developer.

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On non-corner lots with house front doors located on the side, a fence ran along the side walkway leading up to the front door; a gate was located beyond the entryway.

### Corner lots along Truxel Road and River City Way

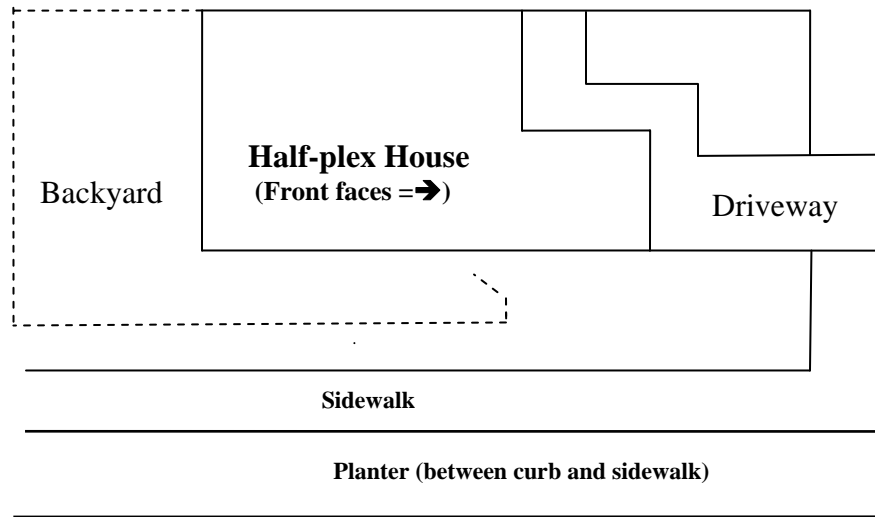
- Original street-side fences enclosing the backyard of corner lots ran about three (3) feet away from the city sidewalk.
- The other homes (with the front door facing the street), had a side fence and gate that stopped about two (2) feet from the front walkway leading up to the door. See the diagram below for this corner lot configuration.



Original Corner Lot Fence Configuration #1  
5 – 6' tall wood fence shown by dotted line

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- 2 Cattail Court, 1 Paddle Court, 1 City Court, and 1702 Bannon Creek had side fences that stopped about 10 feet short of the front of the building (along the garage). See the diagram below for this corner lot configuration.



Original Corner Lot Fence Configuration #2  
5 – 6' tall wood fence shown by dotted line