

ABSTRACT

Project Name: Mt Curve Residence: Timeless Landscape Makeover Promotes Wellness at Mid-Century Home

Location: Minneapolis, MN, USA

Entry Category: Residential Design

Description of Project:

This project re-imagines the landscape for a mid-century residence shaped by a series of curved walls and courtyards. The design accentuates the original design and promotes wellness through a spectrum of spaces, fluid circulation, and access to nature.

A plinth elevates the site to the interior floor height—enabling seamless circulation through courtyards that range from areas for meditative reflection to active socializing. The simple material palette is complemented by gardens of diverse color and texture, punctuated by art and a vegetable garden. The result is a timeless, evolving landscape that supports the owner's wellness.

NARRATIVE

Context

This house and landscape were built as a showcase property for entertaining large groups of people. One of Architectural Record's "Houses of 1964," it exudes modernist design: clean lines, simple materials, and intuitive circulation—programmed equally for entertaining large groups and for cozy contemplation. The original landscape created an oasis driven by "a series of receding 'garden' walls" that create "quiet courtyards, accessible from various rooms, [that] give the house an air of seclusion".¹

Our client had recently purchased the home with the intent to renovate the interior and landscape. Challenges identified in our initial site analysis, informed by our client's desires and the original design, shaped our site strategies:

- Restore the entry sequence
- Ground the house upon a level plinth
- Extend indoor programs to outside spaces
- Improve circulation to re-connect outdoor rooms to one another
- Screen unwanted views to increase privacy

Additionally, we designed the project to reflect the complexity of the human spirit. To achieve this, we relied on three main strategies: a spectrum of living spaces, fluid circulation, and connection to nature. There are spaces for every mood, from entertaining to reflection. Interior spaces seamlessly extend outside. A vegetable garden encourages engaging directly with nature, while a cut flower bed enables growing harvest-ready flowers at waist height to reduce physical strain. The diverse plantings we specified throughout the site attract pollinators—contributing to overall ecological health.

Site Strategies

Restoring Entry Sequence

The property had several mature elm trees that added verticality and a sense of arrival upon entering the drive. Unfortunately, these trees were removed due to disease—diminishing the sense of arrival and leaving the house front exposed. We restored the entry sequence through:

- Extending the horizontal lines of the façade with a level-planted zone from the front door to the sidewalk.
- Reintroducing vertical lines through newly planted allee of trees and understory plantings

Grounding House on Plinth

We designed a level plinth that matches the interior floor height and extends the inside program areas to the outside without having to navigate an elevation change. This concept heavily contributed to our ability to deliver an intuitive circulation pattern.

Extending Indoor Programs to Outside Spaces

The success of the plinth is compounded by creating exterior areas and site lines that beckon you outside. A main seating area, within a minimalist patio, is visible from the living room. A private garden, located off the master bedroom, invites the client out-of-doors to enjoy this calming space. There is also an outdoor dining courtyard located immediately outside the indoor dining area.

Reconnecting Outdoor Room Circulation

Overgrown plantings had reduced the ability to move between courtyards. We refined the circulation through a series of understated pathways, and sited plantings to give paths more clearance.

Increasing Privacy / Accentuating Desired Views

Screening along property edges was carefully considered. For example, the babble of a water wall in the Living Room garden provides an acoustical screen for traffic, while tall hedges on three sides of the property sufficiently screen neighboring yards. For the side yard, we designed a fence that echoes the interior gallery wall, and blends privacy with porosity.

Garden Design

The property has several distinct garden spaces connected through organic circulation paths:

- Front garden // lively threshold. Boxwood create lines of year-round structure. Tulips fill in throughout the rest of the bed for spring color. Perennials of different textures and colors bloom in different seasons.
- Living Room garden // formal entertaining. Very refined planting palette. Lines of hydrangea flank the water feature and enclose the lawn space. Short sedum in front of the water feature offer an interesting change of texture.
- Bedroom garden // restorative quiet and reading. The most private part of the property is enclosed and sheltered by existing trees. Serviceberries form the backdrop. Layers of ferns, iris, and anemone offer different height and colors, while peonies and snakeroot pop up to create an intimate experience.
- Vegetable garden and cut flower garden. This is the space for the client to experiment. The beds reflect the clean geometries of the courtyards, but give the client freedom to be spontaneous in their species selection.

Art Integration

Our client is an art collector—which translated into compelling opportunities to incorporate art throughout the site. We incorporated an existing sculpture into our site plan, and created a siting framework for future art pieces. The client has since commissioned art tailored specifically to the framework spaces.

Sources

1. Building Types Study: Record Houses of 1964, Architectural Record, Mid-May 1964



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1964

Mt Curve residence built
Seven elm trees define
indoor and outdoor
spaces

House featured as one
of Architectural Record's
"Houses of 1964"



1990s

Elm trees removed
after loss to Dutch Elm
Disease



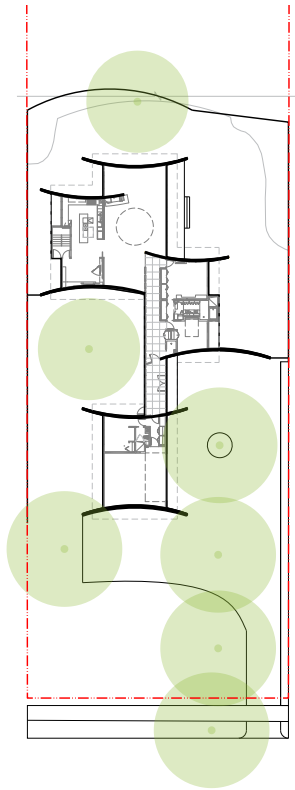
2017

Beginning of the
renovation

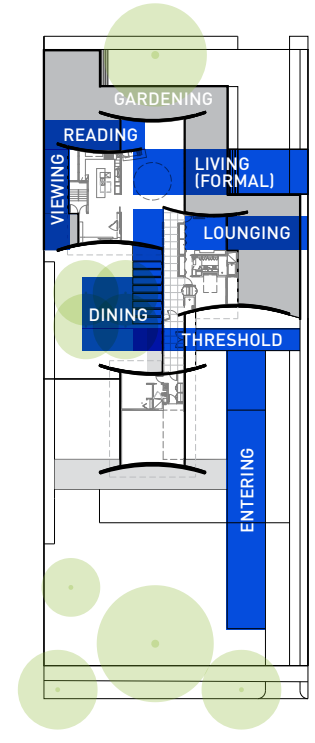
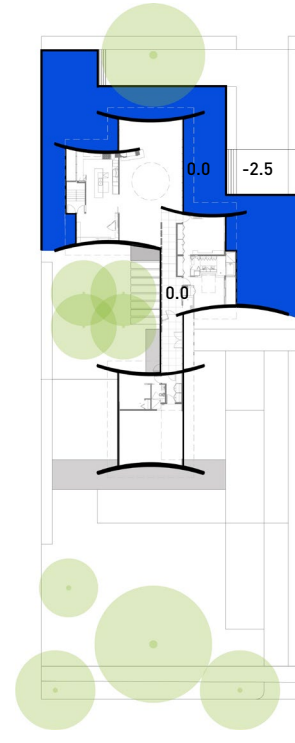
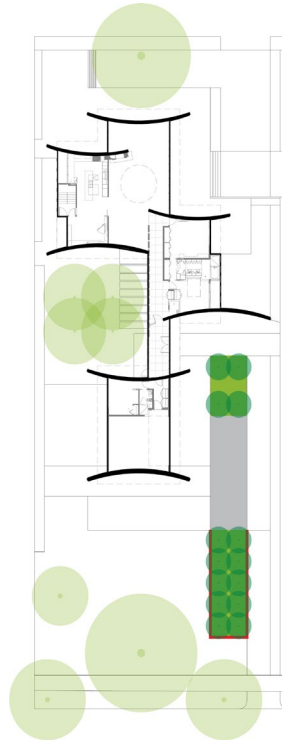
House exposed, lacks a
clear entry sequence

2019

New design restores
and accentuates
original design intent
and establishes fluidity
between indoor and
outdoor spaces



1964 plan



CONTRAST AND BALANCE

Interplay of horizontal and vertical elements extend the visual depth, leading people to the entry that is set back 135' from the street.

RESTORE ENTRY SEQUENCE

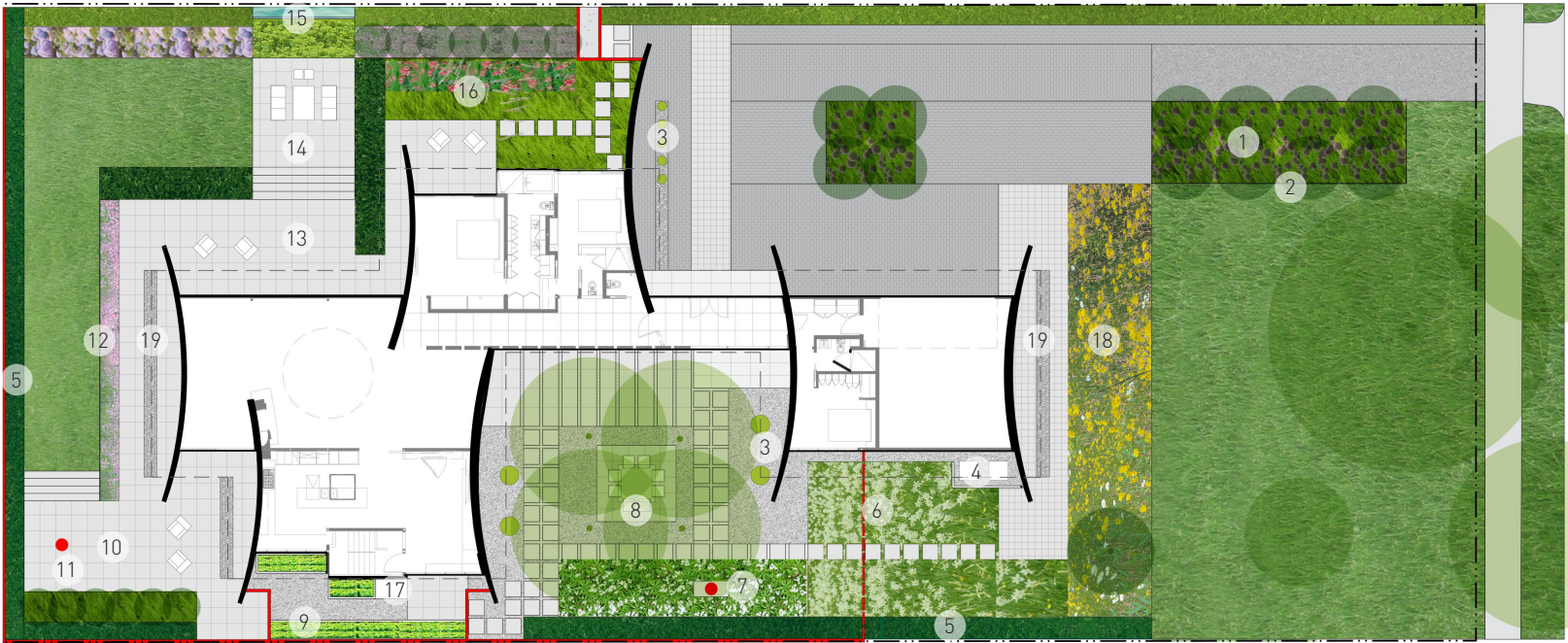
Extend a level planted zone from the front door to the sidewalk. Restore a secluded entry sequence. Balance the horizontal quality of the house with vertical trees and a vertical art element in the auto court.

GROUND THE HOUSE WITH LEVEL PLINTH

Elevate the north yard area and create a continuous level surface around the house. This creates fluid, easy circulation routes and celebrates the flatness of the house.

EXTEND INDOOR PROGRAMS TO OUTDOOR ROOMS

Create outdoor rooms that mirror the adjacent interior program. Allow the activity and special character to flow seamlessly outdoors.



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|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Trees and Perennials | 6. Art Fence | 11. Art Location | 16. Bedroom Garden |
| 2. Metal Planter Edge | 7. Sculpture | 12. Cut Flower /Vegetable Garden | 17. Grill |
| 3. Planter | 8. Dining Courtyard | 13. Upper Living Room Terrace | 18. Perennial Garden |
| 4. AC Units | 9. Vegetable Garden | 14. Lower Living Room Terrace | 19. Gravel Drainage Band |
| 5. Tall Hedge | 10. Reading Terrace | 15. Water Wall | |





We restored the entry sequence through extending the horizontal lines of the façade with a level-planted zone from the front door to the sidewalk, and reintroducing vertical lines through a newly planted allee of trees and understory plantings.



From the auto court, visitors can enter the house via the main entrance. A private entry behind the curved wall leads to a private courtyard (behind the open gate on the right).



The private bedroom garden is marked by a lushly planted yard backed by serviceberry tree and screening hedges along the property line.



The plinth (in foreground and right side) matches the interior floor height—in effect extending the indoor spaces to the outside. Here, the plinth frames a formal seating area. In the back, a water wall feature adds beauty and the soft babble of water.



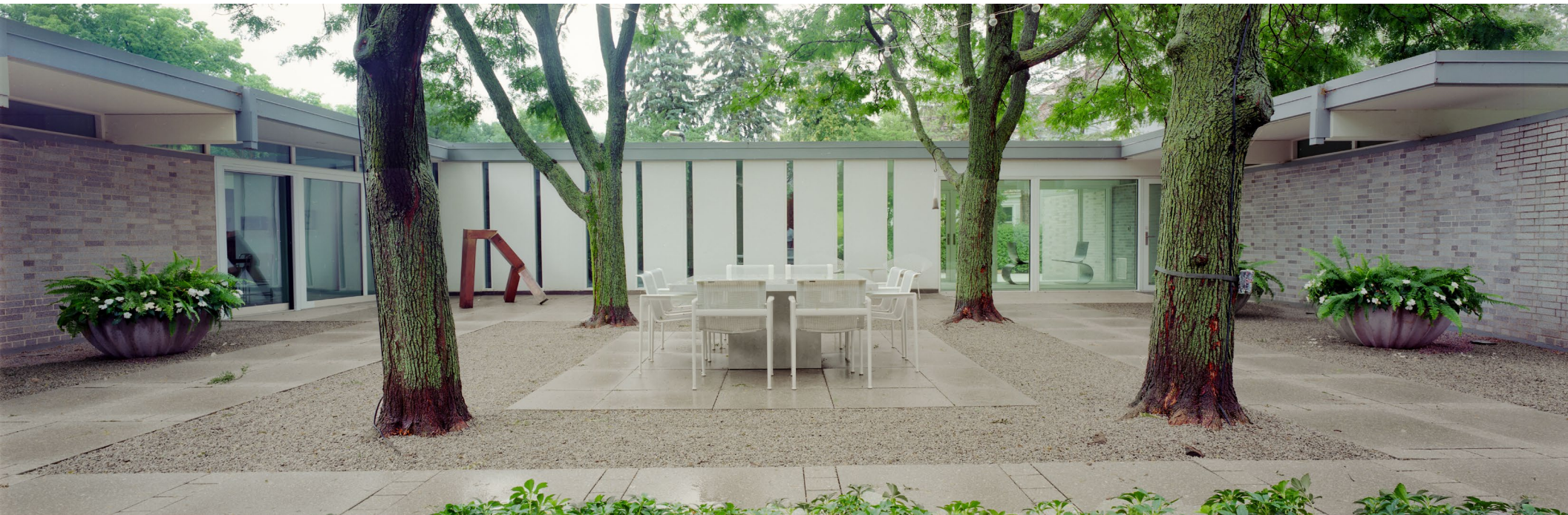
Another view of the plinth demonstrates how the indoor program areas are successfully extended outside. Large, cantilevered steps mark grand transitions from the plinth to the outdoor dining room area.



A cut-flower bed is incorporated into the plinth to enable the client to garden at waist height (to reduce physical strain). The beds reflect the clean geometries of the courtyards, but give the client freedom to be spontaneous in their species selection.



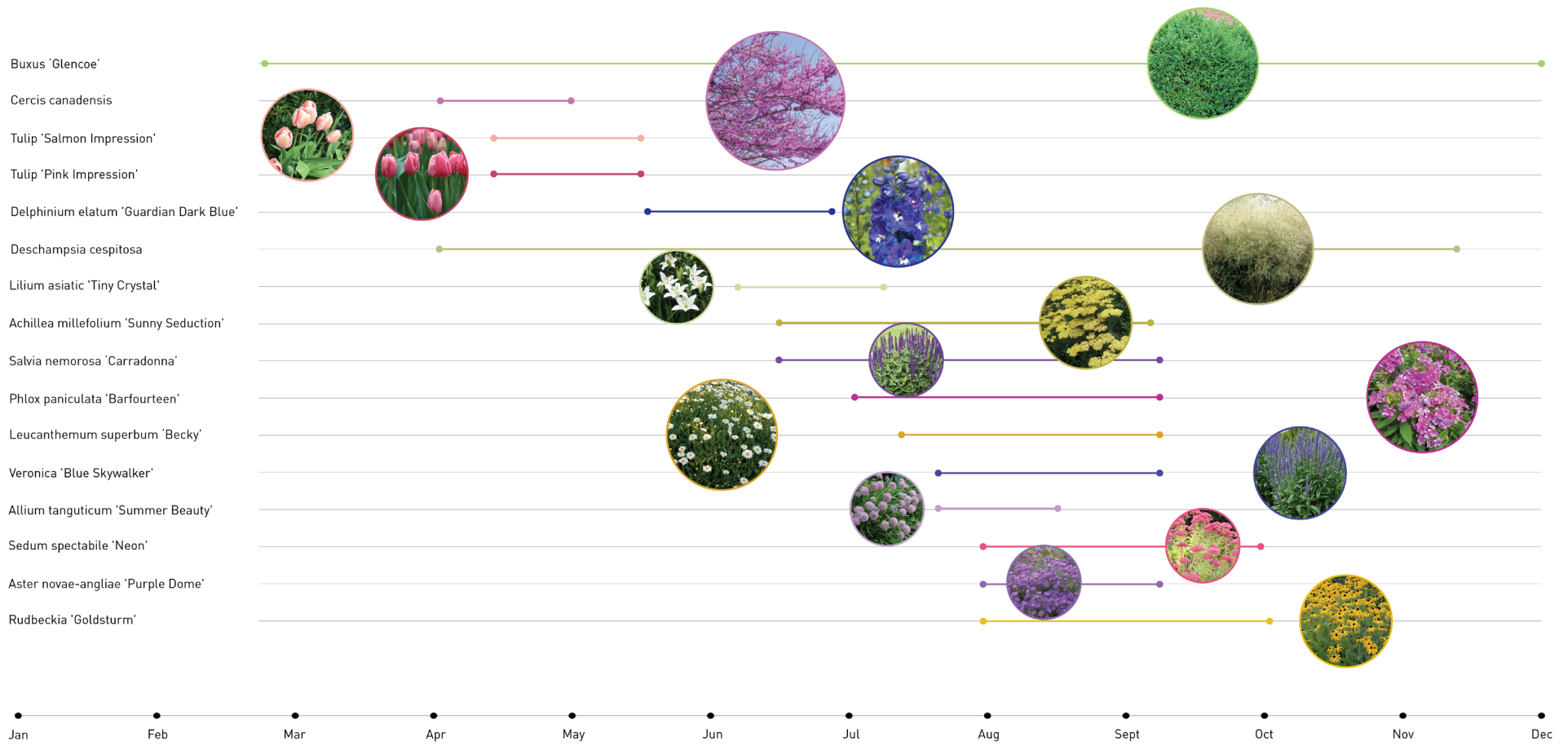
Visible from the home's dining room is this formal outside dining area centered within a minimalist patio. The geometric paving pattern accentuates the mature trees. In the background, a custom-designed fence blends privacy and porosity.



Another view of the dining courtyard, nestled within three sides of the house. The facade in the background directly inspired the paving pattern and the design of the fence in the previous image.



Another view of the dining courtyard. The owner is an art collector, so we developed a framework for the siting of existing and yet-to-be commissioned sculptural pieces (such as the two shown here: in the foreground and in the back right corner).



We optimized our planting plan to provide year-round interest. This diagram shows the planting species for the front garden.



Front garden in early spring, early summer, mid summer, and late summer