

## The second chapter for Cedar Crest, a home in harmony with nature

Story and Photos by Lee Sandweiss | Herald-Times Homes | homes@heraldt.com  
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Environmental visionary and political scientist Lynton Keith Caldwell had moved his family all over the world--from New York and Berkeley, California, to Ankara, Turkey--before he brought them to Bloomington in 1956. Soon after arriving he and his wife Helen began to look for the perfect spot to build their dream house and eventually purchased 12 densely wooded acres east of town.

"Dad wanted to be an architect, but growing up in the Depression, there was no call for architects, but he always aspired to design and build his dream house. When my parents found the land, they built a scale model of the house, which has an Asian influence and was inspired by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. They worked with architect Joe Strain to finalize Dad's design," explained Elaine Caldwell Emmi, the Caldwell's daughter, who was eight years old when her parents began clearing the land to build Cedar Crest. "There was no road into where the house now stands. My parents felled more than 100 trees themselves using a two-handed saw. My mother had amazing biceps! My brother Edwin and I ran around in the woods with hatchets, something kids certainly wouldn't be allowed to do today. I remember always being hot and covered with mosquito bites!"

The Caldwell's moved into Cedar Crest, a sprawling Modernist home with three levels and a wood and stone exterior, in 1960. With approximately 5,000 square feet, it has a massive living room/great room, a huge kitchen opening to an outdoor deck, four bedrooms, three-and-a-half baths, a lower level family room, Keith's study, three fireplaces and even a bomb shelter. Nearly every room has a spectacular view of the surrounding woods. Early on, though, the family realized the house's size and design were going to require considerable maintenance.

"We called it the 'Frank Lloyd Wrong' house, because it had a steady stream of issues," Elaine recalled. "The roof was a big one. Except for the great room, it has a flat roof. Sometimes we had to go up there and bail water off or take a snow blower up there."

The problematic roof was eventually modified and the cantilevered balcony replaced twice, but otherwise nearly all of the house's Midcentury Modern interior and many of its furnishings are original. Helen, an accomplished artist, added many striking embellishments, including a bas relief wood carving of Elaine as a girl in the foyer, and a large abstract painting on the great room ceiling that she laid on scaffolding to execute.

Growing up at Cedar Crest, Elaine and Edwin found their parents' capacity for entertaining thrilling. "They designed this house for throwing large parties, and sometimes we had as many as 200 people here," Elaine remembered fondly. "The kitchen is so large and open. It was perfect for parties, but it was also a favorite gathering place for our family. We could always see birds and wildlife through the glass doors, and we even had a TV suspended from the kitchen wall. Dad had favorite TV shows. Sometimes he'd be in the kitchen with a bowl of ice cream watching Perry Mason or The Twilight Zone."

Watching TV was a fairly rare pastime for Keith. A prolific scholar and author with more than 1,000 articles and 10 books on public policy to his credit, he co-founded IU's School of Public and Environmental Policy (SPEA) and the Sycamore Land Trust, but is most famous for being the architect of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the first act of its kind in the world, which was signed into law on January 1, 1970, by President Richard Nixon. The desk at which he wrote the NEPA is in his former study at Cedar Crest.

This desk is famous. Keith Caldwell wrote the most important environmental law in the history of the world at this desk. It was the first law that said the environment matters, stated Christian Freitag, SLT executive director, running his palm across the desk's surface. This desk is important to the spirit of this place.

Since 2007, Freitag has reverently sat and worked at the desk. When Keith Caldwell passed away at Cedar Crest in 2006 at age 92, the Caldwell family donated the house and contents to the SLT for its permanent headquarters and created an endowment for its upkeep. Helen passed away in Bloomington in November 2010.

The SLT staff and volunteers feel privileged to work in the home that the Caldwell's built and imbued with the mission of their organization to preserve the disappearing natural and agricultural landscape of southern Indiana. Elaine believes that Helen and Keith would be happy to know that the SLT recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. In fact, volunteers stuffed envelopes to the gala celebration at Cedar Crest's dining room table.

"My parents always wanted Cedar Crest to be a hub of activity," said Elaine. "It's wonderful to see that vision continue under the Sycamore Land Trust. They've made magic. The gift was given, but they made it work."

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