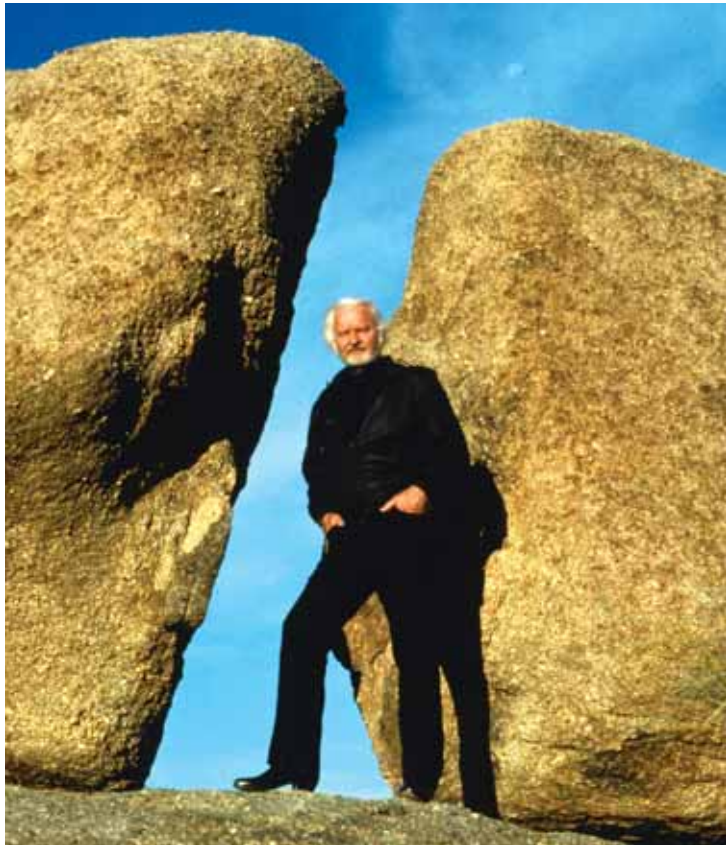


Photo by John Brinkman.



# Meet the BEADLES

By Peter J. Wolf

When people think of modern architecture in the desert, they often picture Palm Springs. But Phoenix, Arizona, has its own legacy of desert Modernism — thanks in large part to the contributions of Alfred Newman Beadle. From 1951 to 1998, Al Beadle designed and built a wide range of projects in and around Phoenix. In addition to dozens of residences, he designed and built banks, hotels, restaurants and a number of apartment buildings, from a modest three-unit complex featured in the Case Study House program, to a 22-story tower, the largest residential building in Phoenix at the time. Many of his projects were published nationally and internationally, and he was honored with countless awards. It was an enviable career for any architect — especially one who, for a good part of his career, was not licensed to practice architecture.

Beadle's buildings, known affectionately as "Beadle Boxes," have often been compared to the spare, rectilinear work of Mies van der Rohe, whose

*Above* Al Beadle, mid 1990s.

*Right* Fingado Residence, Phoenix, Arizona, 1953. Even in Beadle's early work, the architecture is carefully integrated into the landscape.

Photo by Frank L. Gaynor. Collection of Nancy Beadle.







Above Patrick House, 1973, Scottsdale, Arizona. Beadle merged function and architectural grace in the sun shades, which were made of heavy mesh to allow for the passage of wind and rain.

work Beadle admired greatly. Indeed, many Beadle Boxes borrow from Mies's visual language: steel and glass arranged precisely within strict, orderly grid systems. Local architecture historian Bernard Michael Boyle, interviewed in the 2000 documentary film *beadlearnitecture*, suggests that Beadle, "in some respects, especially given the limitations of our climate here, took the application of the Miesian vernacular further than almost any American domestic architect has over the last four decades." And like Mies, Beadle sweated the details — everything from the way one steel beam was welded to another, to the placement of furniture and planters. "Detailing is really the secret to his buildings...it's the way the pieces come together," writes Boyle in his introduction to *Constructions: Buildings in Arizona by Alfred Newman Beadle*, the catalogue accompanying the 1993 exhibition by the same name at Arizona State University. "The message is carried by the details, and the details, as so often is the case in fine art — in *really* fine works of art — [are] not what is there, but what has been left out."

Mies used the expression *beinahe nichts* ("almost nothing") to describe his buildings. Beadle's work, too, has a tendency to

disappear — in most cases into the Sonoran desert. Describing how his own steel and glass home was transformed by night, he told the *Arizona Republic* in 1964, "The reflections from room to room and the reflections of the city's lights make the dimensions of the house disappear. Then we're suspended in space." For Beadle, the effect was magical. "Every house should have a surprise for its owners," he continued. "This was our surprise. We had never suspected this talent of our home."

Reed Kroloff, recently appointed director of Cranbrook Academy of Art, calls Beadle's approach a "rooted Modernism." Beadle "not only never forgot that he was in the desert," said Kroloff recently, "he celebrated it." As a result, his buildings are "remarkably clever...reconciling the rigorous logic of plan and construct with the delicate irregularity of the Arizona landscape." In addition to its brutal heat, the Arizona desert is notorious among builders for its rocky soil. For Beadle, though, this was just another design constraint. "I have always preferred, in my practice, doing residences that have unbuildable lots," he says with pride in *beadlearnitecture*. "I think they produce the best architecture." Referring to the Novak House, built in 1995, he

recalls studying the site only briefly before working out the structure's design in his head. "I called Fran [Novak] and said, 'The lot has told me what it wants, so we're both stuck with it.'"

Although Beadle claimed that he never understood materials, his numerous awards suggest otherwise. He won three Design in Steel awards from the American Iron and Steel Institute — for Beadle House 11 and a Western Savings Bank branch office in the 1960s, and for the Driggs House in 1971 — and an Excellence in Concrete award from the Arizona Aggregate Association. He was also among the first to use the innovative architectural glass being developed in the 1960s and 1970s, such as an insulated bronze colored mirrored glass made by PPG Industries.

Over the years, Beadle earned a reputation for more than his architecture alone. "Al was known as a curmudgeon," say Dan and Elaine Gruber, owners of the last house that Beadle designed and built, "but we never found him to be ornery without good reason. He simply had no patience for those who did not understand and respect his vision." Beadle was notoriously demanding of his contractors and clients — but no more than he was of himself. John Solberg, a builder who worked with Beadle, recalls his first impression of Beadle — who had a full head of white hair, and was dressed head-to-toe in black — as "a cross between Darth Vader and Santa Claus." Beadle's darker side, says Solberg, was merely a reflection of his "determination to do the job right...I think Al was one of the last bastions against mediocrity." Just as often, however, Beadle was jolly and carefree. "I've been building

for 25 years," reports Solberg in *beadlearchitecture*, "and I have never had more fun — I mean, *pure* fun — building than I had working with Al."

As with his trademark transparent buildings, whose multiple layers produce a subtle and unexpected complexity, there was far more to Beadle than first impressions might suggest. "The irony of Al Beadle's rationalist architecture," writes Kroloff, in an essay in the *Constructions* catalogue, "is in Al Beadle's romantic soul." Just as Beadle adopted the Bauhaus aesthetic and its emphasis on building, he also adopted its romantic aim to democratize design, to harness technology in such a way that the world could be made a better place. "I am not willing to accept the death of the Bauhaus," wrote Beadle in his own contribution to *Constructions*. "Their aim was to produce high quality design at an affordable price. Back in the '60s and '70s there was a really strong movement toward making architecture affordable. There was such dedication and conviction. People were ready to jump in front of a bullet for what they believed in." So, despite the number of prestigious private residences and successful commercial projects he built over the years, the modest three-unit Triad Apartments from 1963, in Phoenix, remained Beadle's favorite. "There we were able to show that something better was available, an alternative," he told Kroloff. "It was an affordable, aesthetic environment for young couples and singles — a place for people to make romance."

Alfred Newman Beadle V was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1927. He got his first taste of the building trades as a young

*Below* Three Fountains Apartments, Phoenix, 1964. One of Beadle's best known projects, it received a 1967 award from the Valley Beautiful Citizens Committee.



Photo by August Beinlich. Courtesy Alfred Newman Beadle Collection, Archives/Special Collections, Architecture and Environmental Design Library, Arizona State University Libraries.



A malleable concrete screen filters sunlight and provides privacy for looking or looking on the larger which, actually, serves as a minimally-enclosed entrance, emphasized as a transitional zone by floor tags. It is also a structural point of circulation for the whole house. Sliding glass panels open to the living room, dining room, "small" room and bedrooms. Movable life guards are solar screens.

## a house that calls its family to order

*Meticulously organized, it exacts reciprocal neatness*

"There should be a place for everything," they said to an orderly children, "and everything should be in its place." Not everyone manages, in his own maturity, to practice this preachment. Some people just plain like living in clutter. "Friendly" clutter, they often describe it, and go on to explain that their home simply isn't the kind you can keep-straighened. Other people, driven by private demons, spend most of their time trying to nag a household into neatness—and spend the rest of their time trying to do something about it themselves. The Alfred Bruders, of Phoenix, much as they cherish neatness, are not really the kind who can claim it as a natural virtue. Their house is what keeps them in line—everything about it calls for order, and under such direction, the family finds order easy to keep. Designer Bruders, knowing his family's pattern of living as well as he did, was able to meet its demands with every tidying provision possible. The neatness is an unpretentious, thorough gesture. "When the house looks neat and orderly," says its designer, "it is neat and orderly."

The whimsy of the desert setting would not be transposed into a work scheme. The Alfred Bruders have made, through quiet persistence, a home that is both a work of art and a brilliant white. The symmetry of the house, with its planes of regularly spaced openings and general concrete screen establishes an ordered formality at the outset. Commonly, the children's play post at the rear, with its gracefully curved, movable, is open and breezy.

*Continued on the next page*



The distinction of use between the living room proper (above) and the "small" room (below) is indicated by a glass at the floor. View advances to the latter makes it a reader sitting room for adults in the summer, a more active reading room for children all year round. Front post of the formal, carpeted living-dining area is the fireplace. It stands within a circular hearth of sand slag, bordered by a miniature retaining wall surfaced with glass tiles. A gas jet beneath the slag tapers to a glowing color.



A HOUSE THAT CALLS ITS FAMILY TO ORDER



In this kitchen, sink and stove aren't seen unless they're actually being used. Alongside the cabinet for containing stovetop, appliances and food, are an oven and refrigerator (below). Sink and dishwasher are set to surface with built into the third counter (below) which contains oven and storage space. The slatted wood screen just before eating is partly decorative. Sliding panels lead from the kitchen through outdoor, and the screen of glass allows Mrs. Bruders to keep an all-seeing eye on children at play.



In the center of the house, an island directs traffic flow as efficiently as a policeman



A central storage complex doubles in service; it commands traffic by providing handy storage for everything used at the same time it links an order for organized activity by dividing the house four ways. It partitions the living and dining rooms from the rear kitchen-sitting areas, and serves also as a psychological separation between adult bedroom wing and children's side of the house.





*Opposite* Beadle House 10, 1957, Phoenix. The home Beadle designed for his growing family was featured in the magazine *Living for Young Homemakers* in January 1961. Beadle's emphasis on structure and organization resulted in a home that, according to the article, "calls its family to order." Its dramatic location, at the foot of Camelback Mountain, has put the house at risk of demolition, as land values in the area have skyrocketed.

*Above* Driggs House, 1970, Paradise Valley, Arizona. The house won a Design in Steel award from the American Iron and Steel Institute. "When you're in an Al Beadle environment like this," says owner Gary Driggs, "you're part of the outdoors every time you walk through the house."

man alongside his father, a successful commercial kitchen and restaurant contractor. The father's precise, systematic approach to kitchen installations made an impression on the young Beadle, whose architecture would later demonstrate just how well he'd synthesized these early lessons. Beginning in 1944, Beadle served two years in the South Pacific with the Seabees — the Navy's Construction Battalions — where he reveled in the challenges of building everything from airstrips to hospitals. It was there he was struck by the elegant simplicity of Quonset huts, the corrugated steel structures that were used for a multitude of purposes during the war. Their modular design and ease of assembly and disassembly impressed Beadle, and helped form some of his basic beliefs about what a successful building should be. He returned from the war brimming with confidence, having adopted with great enthusiasm the Seabees' unofficial motto "Can do!"

In 1951, Beadle and his wife, Nancy, moved to Phoenix in search of better weather and business opportunities. Their timing was impeccable. Although Phoenix was still largely agricultural, it was poised for massive growth. Beadle wasted no time in

capitalizing on the city's need for housing. Operating essentially as a one-man show — handling all design and contracting chores — he immediately set to work designing and building his own clean-lined, modern home. But his attempts to build other houses with similarly modern flair met with little success at first. With the banks reluctant to lend money for unconventional projects, Beadle was able to secure financing for his own home, but nothing more. Still a Seabee at heart, he simply found another way to accomplish what he wanted to do. Beadle would build a home for himself and his family, and immediately begin work on another. He would then sell one of them, and begin the process all over again. Although it was hardly an ideal situation, Beadle enjoyed relative freedom. Most of all, he enjoyed building. "I never wanted to be anything more than a builder," he told Kroloff. "That's what the best architects were — master builders."

Beadle was therefore able to learn by doing, using each new residence as a laboratory in which to gain expertise in every phase of a building project. His early homes were less daring than his later works, employing far more wood and brick than steel and glass. Nevertheless, they were modern in every



Photo by Gerald Duchscherer. Courtesy ASU Special Collections.



Collection of Gnosis, Ltd.

*Top* The three-unit Triad Apartments (1963), in Phoenix, was the first multi-family building to be included in the Case Study House program.

*Above* The Boardwalk Apartments, 1963, Phoenix. Over the years, many Phoenix area architects have been introduced to Beadle's work through living at the Boardwalk.

respect, with open plans, ample built-in storage and all the latest conveniences. And, in each case, he took full advantage of the desert climate. One early home was featured in the January 1955 issue of *American Home*. The article, entitled "Wrapped around a Patio," praised Beadle's plan for cleverly making "2200 square feet of house act like 3000... an ancient idea that makes wonderful sense for moderns."

Beadle's houses sold well, and his design services were increasingly in demand for commercial projects as well. The Safari Hotel, with 200 rooms, 11 acres of gardens, three pools,

a dining room and a coffee house, was a massive commission for Beadle, who was not yet 30 years old. The Safari opened in October 1956, and quickly became a Scottsdale landmark. As long as he was building and selling the odd house now and again, the local architects pretty well left Beadle — who was not licensed to practice architecture — alone. (Interestingly, Frank Lloyd Wright, whose Taliesin West was nearby, was also not licensed in Arizona at that time — yet he drew much less attention for it.) Beadle's work was too good, however, to go unnoticed for long. And once he began working on large commercial projects, some registered architects began to feel threatened. Eventually the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects effectively put Beadle out of business. With few options left, the desperate Beadle was rescued with an unexpected telephone call from Alan Daily, an architect from the East Coast who had retired to Phoenix. Daily had heard of Beadle's problem and offered to enter into partnership with him, creating the firm of Daily Associates to enable him to accrue the requisite hours as an apprentice before taking the AIA's registration exams.

Beadle thrived in the 1960s, beginning with his design for the 22-story Executive Towers, Arizona's largest residential building at the time. He also began work on the Triad Apartments, which were included in the highly influential Case Study House program. (Originally called Case Study #28, the Triad later became known as Case Study Apartments #1.) "It is our purpose in incorporating multi-family dwellings into the Case Study House program," read an article in the November 1963 issue of *Arts & Architecture*, "to try to lay to rest the misconception that good design is an unjustifiable and impractical luxury when applied to income property." Beadle himself noted that the project was too small in scope to draw any meaningful conclusions about its feasibility as an investment. From the point of view of the design, however, there was no doubt that the Triad was a great success. By using an open plan, as well as a subtle blending of indoor and outdoor spaces, Beadle managed to create a sense of space well beyond each unit's modest 840 square feet. The Beadles were also the first tenants at the Triad, occupying two units and renting the third to Nancy's parents.

Beadle then applied the same approach to The Boardwalk, a 34-unit complex similar to the Triad. A great success both architecturally and economically, The Boardwalk was its own case study, evidence that good design could indeed be affordable. And Beadle was the first to take advantage, moving his family into a double unit, where they lived for a year before outgrowing it. For Three Fountains, designed in 1964, Beadle modified his plan somewhat to create a complex of two-story, 1,024-square-foot units. Just as he had done with the Triad and Boardwalk, he used a modular structure and took full advantage of the available outdoor space. *Progressive Architecture* included the project in their 1964 feature "The New Row House," noting that "public circulation spaces... have been made to seem generous by limiting the number and scale of elements within them and by visually 'borrowing' space from the adjoining private yards and pool court." Once again, Beadle's apartments rented quickly — this at a time when the market for single-family homes in Phoenix was in a slump and rental vacancies were as high as 30 percent. According to the July

Photo by Gerald Duchscherer. Collection of Gnosis, Ltd.



Photo by Gerald Duchscherer. Collection of Gnosis, Ltd.



Above Beadle House 11, 1963, Phoenix. Beadle took full advantage of the desert landscape, building his family's home on a lot considered by most "a reject." The house, set on steel columns to raise it above the "wash" below, won a Design in Steel award from the American Iron and Steel Institute.

1964 issue of *House & Home*, the success of Three Fountains lay in its "clean-lined design aimed at luring design-conscious tenants away from higher-rent apartments of prosaic style."

In 1965, *Architectural Record* named the Beadle residence (Beadle House 11, designed in 1963) one of its Record Houses, describing it as "a rather sophisticated, hard-edged structure" set against a "natural rocky environment." Indeed, what drew the

most attention to the project was the fact that Beadle had left the site virtually undisturbed, raising the entire structure several feet above the desert wash, a dry stream bed which could become a raging river during the summer monsoons. Located in one of the most desirable neighborhoods of Phoenix, the lot was described by Beadle as a "reject" in a 1964 article in the *Arizona Republic*, remaining vacant while its neighbors were snapped up — which





Photo by Paolo Sanza. Collection of Gnosis, Ltd.

*Above* Gruber House, 1998, Paradise Valley. "He and I were walking around on the lot one day after construction had begun," says Dan Gruber. "I'd been asking him regularly about the colors. He would always say that he was thinking about them. On this day he was walking around with his head down, picking up rocks, turning them over in his hands, and then throwing them away. After about 15 minutes of this he picked up a dark chip and handed it to me. 'Hold that,' he said. The process continued for a while until he picked up another rock and gave it to me as well. Then he said, 'Those will be the colors of your house.'"

*Opposite, top* Novak House, 1995, Phoenix. With its views of the mountains and downtown Phoenix, the Novak House was a "little hawk's nest," said Beadle.

*Opposite, bottom* Novak House.

made the home's success that much more newsworthy. When it won a Design in Steel award from the American Iron and Steel Institute that year, it was published in *The New York Times*. Finally, it seemed, Beadle was getting some well-deserved exposure — and more than a little credibility — for his steel and glass "Beadle Boxes."

During the early 1970s, Beadle continued to attract clients for both residential and commercial projects. He continued to win awards, too, including an Award of Merit for the Driggs House (1970) from the AIA — the same organization that had nearly ended his career in the late 1950s. In 1979, the Museum of Modern Art included Beadle House 11 and the Mountain Bell Building (1971) in its "Transformations in Modern Architecture" exhibition. Beadle slowed down considerably in the 1980s, frustrated with the red tape that so often stood in the way of his building plans. He retired in 1985, but, lured by several temping opportunities, returned to practice in 1988. In 1989, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles introduced a new generation to Beadle's Triad Apartments by including the project in its exhibition "Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses." And in 1993, Arizona State University, to which Beadle was often invited to lecture or participate in critiques of student work, honored Beadle with the "Constructions" exhibition, as well as its Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Practice of Architecture. Beadle continued to practice until he died in 1998.

Today, Beadle's homes are hot properties in and around Phoenix. His greatest contribution, though, may be less tangible. In a tribute, published in a special 1999 issue of *CITY AZ* magazine devoted to Beadle's work, architect and longtime friend of Beadle's Michael P. Johnson suggested that "the most important gift Al left us was the post-war ethical concern for moderate (modest) housing." He called the Boardwalk, Three Fountains and Triad Apartments Beadle's "heroic projects." "We must recognize Al's conviction that what he designed and all that he held dear was, in fact, for the common good," wrote Suzanne D. Johnson, the producer of *beadlearchitecture* and Johnson's wife, in her own tribute. "He built for us, for all of us, so that we could go forth in this world and make romance, and live in harmony, as we are meant to do." ■

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