

TEST of time

WHAT MAY BE SARASOTA'S
ULTIMATE BEACH HOUSE IS AS
FRESH TODAY AS IT WAS WHEN
ARCHITECT CARL ABBOTT
CREATED IT 26 YEARS AGO.



IN THE TREES
The home was designed to maximize beach views and tropical landscape. Above right, dramatic night lighting emphasizes the treehouse feel.



CASA DEL CIELO

rises from the beach on slim concrete columns like an elegant, glass-and-bleached-cedar treehouse.

Its owners, an extended New Hampshire family that vacations here often to escape their cold New England winters, requested

“a beach house with a feeling of lightness and uplift, expressing the joy of living; spaces that are exhilarating to live in,” architect Carl Abbott told us, way back in 1982 when he took us on a tour of the residence shortly after it had won the Excellence in Architecture Honor Award from the American Institute of Architects Florida-Caribbean region. It was breathtakingly beautiful, modern yet anything but sterile, and completely unforgettable.

Now, 26 years later, it seems the AIA agrees. The professional organization has bestowed another important accolade on the sophisticated three-story residence and its architect: the prestigious Test of Time Award of Honor.

The owners are pleased, but not surprised. “It was designed for a purpose and to this day continues to fulfill it; It brings the outside in, but at the same time from the inside lets you look out, says one of the co-owners, an adult child of Abbott’s original client. “You feel like you’re part of the landscape.”

Indeed, it is that sense of place that was at the heart of the design, wrote Abbott in a case statement: “The house has a sense that it is an extension of the site itself,” he wrote. “The trees of the site, the beach, the



UP, UP AND AWAY

A staircase, above, cleverly evokes a nautilus shell. Right, bleached cedar, concrete and Mexican tile add comfort and warmth.

water, the sky, are all felt as materials of the building." Casa del Cielo "always has felt new to me," the architect told us recently. "It's very avant-garde today, as it was when it was built, because of the way it relates to the land."

The AIA Test of Time award is timely for another reason. Abbott actually came to Sarasota 50 years ago, in 1959, after receiving his undergraduate degree from the University of

Florida, to work with I.M. Pei associate Burt Bromsmith on the design of the New College campus. He later pursued his master's degree at Yale, where he studied with the famed Paul Rudolph, who himself had gained early notice as a founder of the Sarasota School of Architecture.

Rudolph was chairman of the jury that gave Abbott that AIA award back in 1982. "The balancing of solids to voids and the flow of space horizontally and vertically are handled in a remarkable architectural way," Rudolph wrote of his former student at the time. In November, Abbott was invited to help dedicate the restoration of Yale's Paul Rudolph Hall - Architecture Building, where he participated in a forum with classmates Lord Richard Rogers and Lord Norman Foster, both international superstars from London.

In 1966, Abbott returned to Sarasota to open his own architecture office. Since then, he has become known as the standard bearer for the modernist movement in Southwest Florida.

Unflinchingly enthusiastic about the design world, he recently completed a vacation home on the island of St. Maarten for a London couple who'd seen his work published in a design book. (*Architectural Record* named it one of the eight most interesting houses in the world when it was in planning stages two years ago.) He currently is designing a residential treatment center for First Step addiction re-

covery programs, a private residence for a physician and his wife on 10 acres of jungle in east Sarasota County and a home on Crescent Beach with a three-story, curving glass-block wall. ("He wanted a house that people would slam on the brakes when they see it," Abbott says of the Canadian client.) And he's designing a ma-

major renovation and potential expansion to his ethereal St. Thomas More Church in Gulf Gate.

"Great architecture doesn't yell and scream, 'Look at me!'" Abbott told us 26 years ago. "But it should have a strong personality." Like Abbott, the house is as engaging and distinctive as ever, and we're still admiring—and hearing—them both. ■

"The balancing of solids to voids... are handled in a remarkable architectural way"

—Paul Rudolph



To see a slideshow of Carl Abbott's work, go to sarasotamagazine.com.