

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Hirsch Residence

Other names/site number: HA-2290

Name of related multiple property listing:

Women in Maryland Architecture, 1920-1970

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

### 2. Location

Street & number: 605 Giles Street

City or town: Havre de Grace State: MD County: Harford

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this X nomination     request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets     does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

    national     statewide     local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A     B X C     D

	December 16, 2022
<b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	<b>Date</b>
<u>Maryland Historical Trust</u>	_____
<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	

In my opinion, the property <u>   </u> meets <u>   </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
<b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	<b>Date</b>
_____	_____
<b>Title :</b>	<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

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**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/California Style

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Wood, Stone, Concrete, Steel

## Narrative Description

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### Summary Paragraph

Located at 605 Giles Street in Havre de Grace, Maryland, the Hirsch Residence is a one-story, mid-century modern, single-family dwelling that was designed by local architect Poldi Hirsch and was completed in 1970. The Hirsch Residence exhibits low, horizontal, modernist massing and is L-shaped in plan, consisting of a main block with a slanted, overhanging shed roof that slopes to the west, and an eastern wing with a low-pitched roof that slopes to the north. Of frame and masonry construction, the house is clad in California redwood siding, with portions of the east, north, and west elevations constructed of uncoursed local fieldstone.<sup>1</sup> The building is topped by a flat roof with intersecting low-pitch slanting roof with wide overhangs and exposed wood rafter tails. All of the dwelling's exterior windows are original and consist of single-pane, wood-framed, awning-sash windows and large single-pane, wood-framed, fixed-sash windows, both on thin wood sills. The main entrance is located in the south elevation, at the east end of a frame front porch that extends across the full width of the main block, sheltered by the overhang of the slanting roof. Secondary entrances are located in the east elevation, beneath a flat-roofed frame side porch, and in the north and west elevations, at the rear patio. A cantilevered frame sun deck extends from the front of the house, east of the main entrance and front porch, and is clad in vertical redwood siding. An original detached, frame, rectangular-plan carport (contributing building) with an overhanging flat roof is situated to the southeast of the house and

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Gunther Hirsch, interview by Jillian Storms and Doug Butari, Havre de Grace, Maryland, 2015. In the interview Dr. Hirsch confirmed that the exterior cladding is redwood and that the stone walls of the house are load bearing rather than just a stone veneer.

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is accessed from it by a covered concrete walkway. The Hirsch Residence has undergone few alterations since its completion, and both the exterior and interior of the house retain excellent integrity.

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## Narrative Description

### *Site*

The 0.44-acre property is situated on the north side of Giles Street, between S. Adams and S. Stokes Streets. The lot is landscaped with grass lawns, medium-sized trees, and shrubs. A walkway comprised of off-set pebble aggregate concrete pavers extends from the sidewalk to the front of the house. The west side of this walkway is framed for a portion of its length by a low stone retaining wall, which continues across the front of the property, west of the walkway. Additional aggregate concrete walkways run along the west side of the carport and along the east elevation. An original lamp post, consisting of a round steel post and glass globe, stands in the front yard, east of the main entrance walkway. A small ornamental goldfish pond ringed in stones, and original to the house, is located at the southeast corner of the dwelling, north of the carport. A second small goldfish pond, also original, is found at the northwest corner of the house. The rear patio is of aggregate concrete, with a set of low steps at its west end, and it is sheltered by the wide roof overhang of the main block's north elevation.

The property's setting is a residential neighborhood of small single-family residences and duplex apartment buildings developed during the mid-twentieth century. The neighborhood is in south Havre de Grace, and it occupies a bluff overlooking the confluence of the Susquehanna River and Chesapeake Bay. The Hirsch Residence, with its low-slung modern form, low-pitched slanted roof, and extensive glazing, stands out from the surrounding houses, which are primarily of the Minimal Traditional and Colonial Revival Styles. Two additional dwellings designed by Poldi Hirsch are located in the neighborhood. Next door to the west, at 607 Giles Street, is a one-story dwelling Hirsch designed c. 1960-1961 for her parents, Izchak and Malca Rottenberg. To the north, at 610 Lafayette Street, is the Sommer Residence (1967-1968), also designed by Hirsch for her brother.

### *Exterior Elevations*

The house is composed of a square-plan main block and a rectangular-plan east wing that extends to the north, creating an L-plan configuration. The south (front) elevation of the main block and east wing are clad in redwood siding. The front porch, which extends across the main block, features oak wood flooring, and is accessed by a set of wide wood steps with wood treads and open risers. A low stone flanking wall frames the east end of the porch, while at the west end, the porch terminates at an extension of the stone west elevation. The south elevation of the main block contains five bays. The main entrance, a wide single-leaf flush wood door, is located at the east end of the porch. The entrance is reached via a set of wood steps with a simple wood railing supported by two unturned wood posts. The lower post and railing have been added since

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the completion of the house. A low fieldstone wall and planter extends along the east side of the steps and extends to the interior of the house. To the west of the entrance is a one-bay projecting exterior closet that stands on short wood posts and is clad in plywood paneling. This novel feature has a tall single-leaf wood door that opens to the east. Inside the closet are wood shelves and a wood mailbox, with a corresponding mail slot cut into the closet door. A rectangular, single-pane transom light extends above the main entrance and exterior closet. East of the main entrance, the south elevation of the main block is pierced by a single fixed-sash window that features a transom light. Two large sliding-glass doors open onto the front porch, west of the entrance and exterior closet. In addition, three large, single-pane, fixed-sash clerestory windows are located just below the line of the sloping roof. All of the dwelling's exterior windows, including the transom lights and clerestory windows, are original and have wood sashes and thin wood sills.

The south elevation of the east wing features seven single-pane awning windows at the basement level, underneath the projecting frame deck. The deck is screened on three sides by a tall privacy blind of vertical wood siding. The first story is divided into four bays. A large aluminum-framed sliding glass door opens onto the deck and is adjacent to a large single-pane, fixed-sash window of the same height. To the west of the deck are two three-part windows, each consisting of a central operable wood awning sash with single fixed panes above and below. Above the windows and doors of the east wing's south elevation are narrow rectangular clerestory windows, situated between the rafters.

The central, fenestrated portion of the east (side) elevation is clad in vertical redwood siding, while the un-fenestrated north and south ends are of stone construction with a narrow band of redwood at the roofline. A side porch extends from the central portion of the east elevation and is sheltered by a wide roof overhang supported by square wood posts. The frame side porch has wood flooring and a wood balustrade consisting of thin wood posts and wood railings. The porch is accessed from the south by a set of wood steps with wood railings. A second set of below-grade concrete steps, descending to the basement level, are separated from the wood porch steps by a low stone wall that the south end of the porch rests on. The basement stairwell is also finished in uncoursed stonework, and a single wood handrail is mounted to its east face.

In the east elevation, there are five single-pane, wood-sash awning windows at the basement level – three under the porch and two to its north. The four first-story bays include two sliding-glass doors that open onto the porch. North of the porch are a pair of three-part windows matching those found in the south elevation.

The two-bay north (rear) elevation of the east wing is clad in redwood siding and is pierced by two single-pane fixed-sash windows. The two windows are each surmounted by a single awning-sash window. In addition, four single-pane clerestory windows are situated just below the roofline.

The four-bay north elevation of the main block features three sets of large sliding-glass doors that open onto the rear patio. To the east of these doors is a two-light, wood, sliding-sash

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window at the kitchen. There are also four large clerestory windows positioned just below the slanting roofline. While the eastern half of the elevation is clad in redwood, the western half is of stone construction and the wall extends beyond the line of the west elevation.

The west elevation of the east wing is primarily clad in stone and is un-fenestrated, with a narrow band of wood siding at the roofline. A single-leaf wood door with transom light is located at the wood siding-clad south end of the elevation, where it meets the main block. The west elevation of the wing extends to the north, past the line of the north elevation. A low, stepped, stone-clad flanking wall stands in front of the west elevation of the east wing and screens a small storage area.

The west elevation of the main block is similarly of stone construction, with a narrow strip of redwood siding at the roofline. A tall, three-part, fixed-sash window is located at the north end of the west elevation. The wood-framed sashes are set within a thick wood surround and are divided vertically by wood mullions. The window rests on a thick band of wood siding.

The original frame carport is of post and beam construction with a wide overhanging flat roof. It is connected to the east wing of the house along the east elevation by a covered walkway supported by tall wood posts. The fascia of the roof is covered in metal flashing and the ceiling of the carport and soffit of the roof overhang are finished in stained cedar wood. The east and west (side) elevations are clad in redwood siding matching the house. The north (rear) elevation of the carport is partially enclosed by a fence-like wood partition.

### *Interior*

The ground floor of the Hirsch Residence is comprised of an entrance foyer, living room, dining room, kitchen, and office (located in the main block), and a den, three bedrooms, and two bathrooms (located in the east wing). Characteristic of mid-century modern residences, the foyer, living room, dining room, kitchen, and den flow together in an open-plan arrangement. A built-in wardrobe with sliding wood doors, located on the west side of the foyer, is on the same alignment as the exterior closet. The interior features oak floors and stained cedar ceilings with exposed wood rafters, joists, and structural posts that are painted black. The walls are primarily finished in a combination of painted plaster and stained pine paneling with walnut wood trim. The west wall of the main living room, and part of the north wall of the dining room area, are of uncoursed fieldstone, that extends seamlessly from the exterior. Hollow pine doors with flat, unmolded walnut surrounds lead into the bedrooms, bathrooms, and office. Closets in these spaces and the hallways feature sliding wood doors.

The principal interior spaces of the house are illuminated through a combination of direct, indirect, and natural lighting. The ceilings of the foyer, living room, office, and kitchen slope upward from west to east and large clerestory windows are found in the east walls of the kitchen and office. These clerestory windows contribute to the natural daylighting of the interior, along with the house's large first-story windows and sliding-glass doors. Skylights are found in the

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kitchen, main east-west hallway, and bathrooms. Additional lighting is provided by original metal can lights mounted to the ceiling joists.

On the east side of the living room, at its junction with the foyer, is a custom-fabricated metal, open, fireplace with a cylindrical hearth, conical metal top, and round metal flue that extends up through the ceiling. The hearth sits on a raised platform of ceramic tile edged with wood trim and is framed by a two-sided fireback faced in glazed ceramic tile that stands approximately six feet tall and serves to visually separate the foyer area from the living room. The cream-colored fireback tiles are molded with a design that closely resembles Mayan pictographic glyphs. The metal hearth and fireback were planned elements of the interior, as it was important to Poldi Hirsch to have an open hearth at the center of the dwelling. They were not installed until several years after the house was completed due to permitting delays. Hirsch was insistent that the hearth be included, however, and wanted it to be a central feature of the house rather than placing it against the masonry west wall.<sup>2</sup>

The kitchen has linoleum tile floors, formica countertops, and original built-in olive green Paul McCobb cabinets. The bathrooms also retain most of their original mid-century materials and finishes, with ceramic tile floors, plaster and pine paneled walls, and built-in wood wall cabinets. In both the master and children's bathrooms, sliding wood doors separate the toilet and shower areas from the sink areas.

The basement level is reached by a stair that descends from the ground floor at a point situated between the kitchen and the main east-west hallway. The ground-floor entrance to the open stairwell is framed on either side by short partitions composed of narrow vertical wood slats that extend from the floor to the ceiling. The open-string stair features polished maple treads and railing.

The basement level contains the former architectural studio of Poldi Hirsch, former office of her husband, Günther Hirsch, an office, workshop, laundry room, a large open-plan playroom, and a utility closet. The basement has ceramic tile floors, pine paneled and concrete block walls, and asbestos tile ceilings. As on the ground floor, there are hollow pine doors with walnut surrounds and closets with sliding wood doors. Lighting of the basement is enhanced through the narrow basement level windows. In addition, the basement contains an original fallout shelter and an underground passage that connects the Hirsch Residence with the basement of 607 Giles Street, the former residence of Poldi Hirsch's parents.

### Integrity

The Hirsch Residence has retained an exceptionally high degree of integrity across all categories, allowing the house to convey its historical and architectural significance. The house is still in its original **location**, oriented towards Giles Street, and its residential neighborhood **setting** remains relatively unchanged. Integrity of **design**, **materials**, and **workmanship** are particularly strong. The house retains its original form, ground plan, and all of its original exterior design elements,

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication, Elaine Hirsch, April 8, 2022.

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with no major alterations or additions present. The original windows have been retained, as well as exterior California redwood siding and stonework. The interior exists in a remarkable state of preservation and exhibits all of its primary materials and finishes – from the oak flooring, pine paneling, and walnut trim to the original cedar ceilings and wood structural members. The interior layout is also intact and has not been altered. The kitchen and bathrooms retain their vintage mid-century cabinets and fixtures. Collectively, these aspects of integrity allow the house to convey the feeling and sense of time of a very well-designed mid-century modern custom home and the association and relatively intact physical features convey the Hirsch Residence’s historic character and provide a direct link to the context of postwar women architects in Maryland.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

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Social History – Women’s History  
Architecture

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**Period of Significance**  
1969-1970

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**Significant Dates**  
1969 (design)  
1970 (construction)

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**Significant Person**  
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

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**Cultural Affiliation**

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**Architect/Builder**  
Poldi Hirsch (architect)  
Carl Thomas (builder)

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### Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Hirsch Residence demonstrates both historical and architectural significance under the National Register Multiple Property Submission *Women in Maryland Architecture, 1920-1970*. The Hirsch Residence is an example of the “Residential Properties” property type, as defined in the MPS. Residential Properties designed and constructed after 1945 should demonstrate significance under National Register Criterion A in the Area of Social History – Women’s History as the work of women architects in Maryland under the context *Women Architects in Maryland During the Postwar Era, 1945 to 1970*. The Hirsch Residence, designed by Maryland architect Poldi Hirsch as both her personal home and office, illustrates the contributions of female design professionals active in Maryland during the twentieth century. Hirsch was one of only a handful of women architects active in the state during this period. The work of Hirsch and other women in the field helped establish a more equitable environment within the architectural profession and their stories form part of the broader social history of women’s efforts to achieve greater equality within American society. Residential Properties should also demonstrate architectural significance under National Register Criterion C in the Area of Architecture. The Hirsch Residence meets the listing requirements as a distinctive example of a well-designed mid-century modern dwelling indicative of the trends that shaped modern residential design after World War II. The Period of Significance is 1969-1970, which coincides with the design and construction of the house.

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### Narrative Statement of Significance

The Hirsch Residence is significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with the MPDF historic context *Women Architects in Maryland During the Postwar Era, 1945 to 1970*. As discussed in this context, women faced challenges to establishing their place within the field of architecture during the twentieth century and they were marginalized as a gender/occupational group within society throughout the period 1945-1970. The biography of Poldi Hirsch, who struggled to establish her career in Havre de Grace despite her talent and European architectural training, is a testament to the perseverance of women architects within this social and cultural milieu, and illustrates the progress made by women for greater gender equality during the twentieth century. Women architects during the twentieth century designed grand country estates, war worker housing, government facilities, postwar suburban dwellings, and a range of additional building types. A broader scholarly interest in under-represented social histories has shaped the direction of research in the field of history and allied disciplines since the 1970s, and the work of women architects and landscape architects has been the subject of books, articles, and retrospective exhibits since that time. Poldi Hirsch is particularly noteworthy as one of twelve-known women design professionals highlighted in the 2016 exhibit *Early Women of Architecture in Maryland*, curated by the Baltimore Architectural Foundation.

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The Hirsch Residence is also significant under National Register Criterion C as an example of a custom-designed mid-century modern residence of exceptional quality and sophistication. The house is one of three striking modernist residences designed by Poldi Hirsch in Havre de Grace during the 1960s that embody the core tenets of the Modern Movement. Hirsch, a native of Germany, received architectural training in Switzerland during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Her design for the Hirsch Residence communicates the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto, and other leading modernist architects of the era through its modern, functional design, use of natural materials, interior layout, and site integration. Hirsch designed a range of residential property types during her career such as single-family residences and duplex apartment buildings that were characterized by their superior design, functionality, and modernist aesthetic. Hirsch, and her physician husband, Gunther Hirsch, sought to provide a healthier living environment for families through a merger of public health and design, and her residential designs feature ample natural daylighting, spatial organization attuned to the needs of working families, and a merger of the indoor and outdoor experience. The Hirsch Residence displays all of these characteristics, and its sleek modernist lines, exterior of California Redwood and locally quarried stone, and non-traditional fenestration stand apart from other houses in Havre de Grace constructed during the same period. The Hirsch Residence is regarded as Poldi Hirsch's best surviving work and was featured in the *Baltimore Sun* in 1973.<sup>3</sup>

## Historic Context

### *Women Architects in Maryland after 1945*

Women first began to practice architecture professionally in the United States during the conservative social environment of the late Victorian era. The small number of architecture schools that accepted female students during this period included the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cornell and Syracuse Universities, the University of Illinois, and the Cooper Union in New York. In 1888, Louise Blanchard Bethune became the first woman to be accepted as a member of the American Institute of Architects. The Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, established in 1916 by Harvard University professor Henry Atherton Frost, was an important institution in the early history of women in architecture that produced accomplished graduates such as Gertrude Sawyer, Rose Greely, and Victorine Du Pont Homsey. While some women were able to earn degrees in architecture, women architects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were often denied employment and career advancement in established architectural firms.<sup>4</sup>

The period from 1920 to 1945 continued to be a challenging environment for women architects attempting to establish their careers in the eastern U.S., and the field of architecture remained male dominated. Large firms in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., and the design offices of federal agencies, were led and staffed by men. The Baltimore chapter of the American Institute

<sup>3</sup> Helen Henry, "Architect Designs Her Own House," *Baltimore Sun*, December 16, 1973, SM36.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Paine, "Pioneer Women Architects," in *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective*, Susana Torre, ed. (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1977), 54-56; Sarah Allaback, *The First American Women Architects* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 26-28, 47.

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of Architects was established in 1870, and by the 1920s it was still composed exclusively of male members.<sup>5</sup> There were no women members of the Baltimore Chapter until after World War II.

Poldi Hirsch was one of a small number of architects who were practicing in Maryland after World War II. The war years were a period of empowerment for women that enabled large numbers of women to work outside of the home in the defense industry and other areas. After the war, the suburban housewife was elevated in television, advertising, and other media as an idealized portrayal of the role of women in American society. However, the growing complexity of the postwar economy, coupled with greater educational attainment for women and a changing social and cultural landscape in the U.S., resulted in increased female participation in the field of architecture.<sup>6</sup>

While still a minority, growing numbers of women entered design professions and were working at architectural firms across the country during the early postwar period, although architecture continued to be associated primarily with men. Women were also branching out and establishing their own firms, sometimes in partnership with their architect husbands, which helped them navigate the difficulties of becoming established in the male-dominated field. Harvard University's architecture school opened its doors to female applicants in 1942 after merging with the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture. In the summer of 1948, *Architectural Record* published a series of articles on women architects and their work to serve as "proof, if any were needed, that architecture is a field where women's talents are being accepted and appreciated." Among the women featured were architects Gertrude Sawyer of Washington, D.C. and Victorine Homsey of Wilmington, Delaware, both of whom established their careers prior to the war, but were actively designing in Maryland during the postwar period.<sup>7</sup> A survey conducted by *Architectural Record* identified 108 recent female architecture graduates who were practicing in the U.S., some of whom had established their own firms. Of this number, thirty-two women were members of the AIA.<sup>8</sup>

After World War II, AIA Baltimore lifted its membership restrictions and opened to women. The move paralleled similar initiatives at the national level to make the AIA more inclusive of the diverse architects practicing throughout the country. In 1955, Helen Staley became the first woman to join the Baltimore chapter of the AIA. Her work was featured in the AIA Maryland yearbook in 1955 and 1957. In 1960, Chloethiel Woodard Smith was elected to the AIA College

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Belfoure, *AIA Baltimore: A Chapter History from 1870 to 2005* (Baltimore: AIA Baltimore, 2004), 36-37.

<sup>6</sup> John P. McKay, et al., *A History of Western Society*, vol. 3 (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 1003-004.

<sup>7</sup> "A Thousand Women in Architecture: Part II," *Architectural Record* 103, no. 6 (June 1948): 108.

<sup>8</sup> "A Thousand Women in Architecture: Part I," *Architectural Record* 103, no. 3 (March 1948): 105.

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of Fellows, followed by Victorine DuPont Homsey in 1967.<sup>9</sup> Poldi Hirsch became a member of the Baltimore Chapter of the AIA in 1964.<sup>10</sup>

Amid the social and cultural transformations of the postwar era, women increasingly advocated for a more equitable career landscape, and the tremendous impact of the Women's Liberation Movement led to more women entering the field of architecture as professionals.<sup>11</sup> Despite these breakthroughs, women still faced difficulties in advancing their careers within the profession. A 1969 study published by *Architectural Forum* found that women constituted less than one percent of the approximately 20,000 registered architects in the U.S. at the time. In addition, women represented less than five percent of the architecture students enrolled at U.S. universities. Women reported encountering difficulties in securing their first jobs after graduation, income disparities, harassment from on-site contractors, and being siloed into the area of residential design.<sup>12</sup> During the mid-1970s, students at Washington University and the University of Oregon held symposiums examining these issues and the role of women in architecture.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the work of historic and contemporary women architects received greater scholarly attention, and a groundbreaking exhibit curated by Susana Torré opened at the Brooklyn Museum in 1976.<sup>14</sup>

Poldi Hirsch was one of a small number of women architects active in Maryland during the postwar period who were born in Europe and immigrated to the United States, where they established architectural practices. These women were educated, and in some cases practiced, in central and southeastern Europe, where attitudes and social norms regarding gender and female participation in technical professions such as architecture and engineering were quite different than in the states. In countries where educational restrictions were present, women traveled to Austria, Switzerland, France, or Germany to study architecture. By the early 1960s, women composed approximately twenty-five percent of practicing architects in Poland, and by the fall of the Berlin Wall, other nations had equaled or surpassed this figure, in sharp contrast to the U.S.<sup>15</sup>

### *Architect Poldi Hirsch*

Poldi Hirsch was born in Remscheid, Germany in 1926. With the rise of fascism in Germany, the Jewish Hirsch family moved to Israel. Her father regarded architecture as an appropriate profession for women and encouraged Poldi to pursue it as a career. While in Israel, Hirsch

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<sup>9</sup> AIA Baltimore, "Early Women of Architecture in Maryland," <https://www.aiabaltimore.org/baltimore-architecture-foundation/early-women-of-architecture-in-maryland/#:~:text=Three%20of%20the%20women%3A%20Rose,1922%2C%20and%201925%2C%20respectively> (accessed January 2021).

<sup>10</sup> American Institute of Architects, Membership Application, "Poldi Hirsch," Application no. 20488, December 1, 1964.

<sup>11</sup> American Architectural Foundation, *That Exceptional One: Women in American Architecture, 1888-1988* (Washington, D.C.: American Architectural Foundation, 1988), 13-14.

<sup>12</sup> Beatrice Dinerman, "Women in Architecture," *Architectural Forum* 131, no. 5 (December 1969): 50.

<sup>13</sup> *That Exceptional One*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> Dolores Hayden and Gwendolyn Wright, "Architecture and Urban Planning," *Signs* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 926.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Pepchinski and Mariann Simon, eds., *Ideological Equals: Women Architects in Socialist Europe, 1945-1989* (London: Routledge, 2016), 2.

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studied for two years at the Hebrew Technical College in Haifa from 1946-1948, and she worked as a draftsman in the studios of Tel Aviv architects Emil Levi and R. Bannet. She met Gunther Hirsch, a young medical student, and accompanied him to Geneva, Switzerland, where they were married. Poldi Hirsch studied architecture at a school in Geneva for one and a half years before transferring to the University Ecole Polytechnique in Lausanne, Switzerland, where she graduated with a degree in architecture in 1953. While in school, she was employed in the offices of several Geneva firms. Her architectural training was heavily influenced by the work of early European modernists such as Le Corbusier, and she believed that buildings should be “built well and organized” and that their design should be original rather than copying styles of the past.<sup>16</sup>

Poldi Hirsch moved to the United States with her husband and daughter in 1953. The family initially settled in the Pittsburgh area, where Gunther Hirsch had obtained a medical internship. She worked for one year as an architect in the Sewickley, Pennsylvania office of Bradley, Patterson, and Burgener, but was unable to obtain an architectural license in Pennsylvania, despite her rigorous European architectural training. The Hirsch family eventually moved to Havre de Grace, where Dr. Gunther Hirsch started a medical practice. The couple liked the waterfront town, close to Baltimore and accessible to Philadelphia and New York by bus or train. The community also had a large Jewish community who welcomed them. Poldi Hirsch received a Maryland architect’s license in 1962 and established an independent practice in Havre de Grace.<sup>17</sup> One of her first projects in Maryland was for the design of a medical office building for her husband at 131 S. Union Avenue in 1962. She designed a second story to the building c. 1980 to accommodate the medical practices of her daughters.<sup>18</sup>

Hirsch encountered difficulty in finding architectural commissions in Havre de Grace. According to Dr. Hirsch, as a woman architect, she was considered an “oddy” and encountered great difficulty in finding clients. At one point, she considered abandoning her career. In adapting to these challenges, she undertook the financing, design, and construction of numerous projects herself. Hirsch primarily designed residential projects, from single-family dwellings to small duplex townhouses intended to serve working-class families. Poldi Hirsch was demanding on-site, had a keen eye, and walked around with a level and measuring stick calling the builder’s attention to errors, making her unpopular with some contractors. One roofer got so mad with her, because she pointed out mistakes, that he took away a ladder that Hirsch had used to mount the roof, leaving her stranded. As Dr. Hirsch Gunther related, “They were used to doing it their way. But their way was not her way.”<sup>19</sup>

The houses designed by Hirsch in Havre de Grace range from simple, one-story, brick, side-gabled dwellings, which are reminiscent of the Minimal Traditional Style, to houses that are

<sup>16</sup> American Institute of Architects, Membership Application, “Poldi Hirsh,” Application no. 20488, December 1, 1964; Dr. Gunther Hirsch, interview.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Erika Quesenbery Sturgill, “Modernist Talent of Architect Poldi Hirsch to be Featured,” *Cecil Whig*, September 30, 2015, A14.

<sup>19</sup> Dr. Gunther Hirsch, interview.

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more modernist and forward looking in their design. Examples of the latter include the Rottenberg Residence at 607 Giles Street (1961-1963), the Sommer Residence at 610 Lafayette Street (1968), and the Hirsch Residence (subject property) at 605 Giles Street (1969-1970). The Hirsch family home and the family were highlighted in a *Baltimore Sun* article in 1973. *Sun* writer Helen Henry called the house a “striking spread of redwood, stone and glass,” and “something of a showpiece in Havre de Grace.”<sup>20</sup> The house has a low-pitched roof with exposed rafters and makes use of extensive glazing. The use of natural stone and wood as the primary exterior cladding materials harmonizes with the wooded suburban landscape. The attached carport exhibits functional, modern lines. Poldi Hirsch’s design for the Mr. and Mrs. David H. Witt residence, located at 107 Brotherton Court, was featured in the *Baltimore Sun* in October 1974 in article entitled “Modern Mansard” in reference to the dwelling’s roof.<sup>21</sup>

The duplex residences designed by Hirsch, located in and around Havre de Grace, exhibit a modern, minimalist style with flat roofs and simple box-shaped forms. Examples include 715-725 Lewis Street (1963), 651-653 Alliance Street (1966), 710 Lewis Street (1967), and 714-716, 902-908, and 932-934 Chesapeake Drive (1967-1968). Hirsch ensured that her residential projects were built well and would turn them over one-by-one so that she could retain the group of skilled laborers that she employed.<sup>22</sup>

By the mid-1960s, Hirsch collaborated with other architects and firms on the design of much larger apartment complexes and office buildings. In 1965, she teamed up with the Baltimore architectural firm of Tatar and Kelly in designing a 120-unit low-income apartment project in Havre de Grace. The project was sponsored by the Public Housing Administration.<sup>23</sup> In 1968, Hirsch again partnered with Tatar and Kelly in producing a study for the Harford County Commissioners on the proposed Harford County Government Center. The study presented an analysis of present and future trends in Harford County, an examination of the impact that the center would have on the county and the town of Havre de Grace, an analysis of potential sites, and proposals for its development.<sup>24</sup> During the 1970s, Hirsch designed an addition to the office complex of the Huber Corp., located at 861-899 Revolution Street in Havre de Grace.<sup>25</sup> Poldi Hirsch also collaborated with Baltimore architect Calvin Kobsa, AIA and partnered with him in designing an apartment building in Aberdeen and rest area buildings on Interstate-95 in Maryland.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Helen Henry, “Architect Designs Her Own House,” *Baltimore Sun*, December 16, 1973, SM36.

<sup>21</sup> Helen Henry, “Modern Mansard in Split Cedar,” *Baltimore Sun*, October 27, 1974, SM42.

<sup>22</sup> AIA Baltimore and the Baltimore Architecture Foundation, Architect Biographies, “Hirsch, Poldi (1926-1987),” <https://aiabaltimore.org/baltimore-architecture-foundation/resources/architect-biographies/poldi-hirsch/> (accessed February 2022).

<sup>23</sup> “Apartment Project,” *Baltimore Sun*, December 16, 1965, F4.

<sup>24</sup> Harford County Governmental Center Study Committee, *Harford County Governmental Center Study*, prepared by consulting planners Tatar and Kelly and Poldi Hirsch, Associated Architects-Planners, May 1968.

<sup>25</sup> Architect Biographies, “Hirsch, Poldi (1926-1987).”

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Gunther Hirsch, interview.

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Dr. Gunther and Poldi Hirsch were avid art collectors. According to Dr. Hirsch, Poldi “liked everything that was modern, Picasso, Braque, Chagall, the latest twentieth-century artists. It’s not that she did not like the classical, but she was tired of looking at Madonnas.”<sup>27</sup> The Hirschs supported local artists and owned works by a number of Maryland artists such as Richard Roth, Edith Luxenburg, Hannah Cohen, Darlene Meadows, Ursula Martino, Mitsui Elston, Jim Spacco, and Tommy Head. Inspired by west coast art shows, the Hirschs started the Havre de Grace Art Festival c. 1963. During its heyday, almost 400 artists from all over the country came to Havre de Grace to exhibit and sell their work. In addition, Dr. Hirsch, who served as the Mayor of Harve de Grace for eight years, was instrumental in the founding of the Harford Opera Theater and served as its president.<sup>28</sup>

Poldi Hirsch became a member of the Baltimore Chapter of the AIA in 1964 and was a member of the Société Suisse des Ingemeurs et des Architectes, a Swiss professional organization.<sup>29</sup> In addition, Hirsch was a lifelong member of Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist charity promoting women’s health and well-being. Not until 1980, did poor health lead her to scale back her architecture practice. Poldi Hirsch passed away in 1987, after a prolific career. Her surviving body of work in Maryland is a testament to her talent and determination.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Property History and Design and Construction of 605 Giles Street*

The subject property (605 Giles Street) consists of the eastern ten feet of Lot 54, all of Lot 53, and the western twenty feet of Lot 52, in Block 4 of the Bloomsbury Park subdivision. Bloomsbury Park was created by the Bloomsbury Park Company in 1919 from the Upper and Lower Bloomsbury Farms, the nineteenth-century estate of Elisha Lewis of Harford County. The two tracts totaled 591 acres, and extended from Revolution Street to the Chesapeake Bay, and from Freedom Lane to Juanita Street. In 1924-1925, the Bloomsbury Park Company and its secretary, state senator Millard E. Tydings, sold Lots 52-54 to Joseph Hamburger.<sup>31</sup> After his death in 1944, Selina Hamburger, his sister and surviving heir, retained ownership, and in 1955 she sold Lot 52 to Armando M. and Rita M. Tarquini.<sup>32</sup> The following year, in 1956, Selina Hamburger sold Lots 53-54 to Dr. Gunther and Poldi Hirsch.<sup>33</sup> The Hirschs purchased Lot 52 from the Tarquinis in 1958.<sup>34</sup> In 1961, Gunther and Poldi Hirsch sold the west fifty feet of Lot 54 (607 Giles Street) to Poldi’s parents, Izchak and Malca Rottenberg.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Helen Henry, “Architect Designs Her Own House,” *Baltimore Sun*, December 16, 1973, SM36.

<sup>29</sup> American Institute of Architects, Membership Application, “Poldi Hirsh,” Application no. 20488, December 1, 1964.

<sup>30</sup> AIA Baltimore and the Baltimore Architecture Foundation, Architect Biographies, “Hirsch, Poldi (1926-1987),” <https://aiabaltimore.org/baltimore-architecture-foundation/resources/architect-biographies/poldi-hirsch/> (accessed February 2022).

<sup>31</sup> Harford County Land Records, Liber 189, Folio 459, deed recorded September 23, 1924; Liber 195, Folio 202, deed recorded October 27, 1925.

<sup>32</sup> Harford County Land Records, Liber 445, Folio 551, deed recorded October 7, 1955.

<sup>33</sup> Harford County Land Records, Liber 476, Folio 525, deed recorded November 7, 1956.

<sup>34</sup> Harford County Land Records, Liber 506, Folio 9, deed recorded June 17, 1958.

<sup>35</sup> Harford County Land Records, Liber 573, Folio 558, deed recorded July 5, 1961.

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Poldi Hirsch designed the house at 605 Giles Street in c. 1969, planning it according to the requirements of her three daughters and physician husband. The basement level contained her architectural studio and office for client meetings, as well as an office and emergency treatment room for her husband, entered via a separate basement entrance. Her daughter's bedrooms were located in the east wing with a private entrance. The house was designed with ample storage space and conveniences such as a chute Hirsch used for sending items from the upstairs office to her draftsman at work in the basement studio, and a built-in ironing board contained in a specially designed hallway closet. In placing her architectural studio in the basement, Hirsch separated work functions from more private family spaces in the home. Another key aspect of the conceptual planning was to create a space for the display of the Hirsch's large art collection.<sup>36</sup> Poldi Hirsch was also attuned to the acoustical properties of the materials used in the principal interior spaces of the house.<sup>37</sup>

The house was constructed by local builder Carl Thomas and was completed in 1970.<sup>38</sup> The wood framing members were delivered by ship into Baltimore from California. Construction was temporarily delayed when these components were held up in port for six months due to a dockworkers strike. Hirsch instructed the contractors to paint the wood rafters black to make them appear as steel rather than wood. The exterior wood cladding is all vertical redwood siding, also from California. The building stone was sourced locally from a quarry near Havre de Grace and the stonework was executed by a local stonemason.<sup>39</sup>

### *Mid-Century Modern House Design*

The Modern Movement transformed residential design in America and Maryland during the twentieth century, particularly after World War II. Mass-produced housing was a key driver of architectural modernism during this period. In Harford County, the forerunner to this phenomenon was the construction of Sears mail-order kit houses in the many residential subdivisions being developed in the county prior to World War II. Florence and Sarah Cronin were the first to build a prefabricated Sears house in the county in 1918. The sisters were the first professional working women in their family, and they established their independence by moving off the family farm into their own house.<sup>40</sup>

Contemporary with the Sears kit houses was the establishment of the Bauhaus School in Weimar, Germany in 1919. The school's founder, Walter Gropius, sought to establish a modern aesthetic that bridged the artistic and industrial, with an emphasis on mass production. The Bauhaus architects replaced traditional closed floorplans with a more free-flowing, open interior organization of space, and they placed emphasis on industrially-produced materials such as steel, concrete, and glass. French architect Le Corbusier similarly employed these concepts with his

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<sup>36</sup> Helen Henry, "Architect Designs Her Own House," *Baltimore Sun*, December 16, 1973, SM36.

<sup>37</sup> Personal communication, Dahlia Hirsch, July 3, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Henry, "Architect Designs Her Own House"; Personal communication, Elaine Hirsch, April 8, 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Dr. Gunther Hirsch, interview.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Weeks, *An Architectural History of Harford County, Maryland* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 187-90.

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mass-produced “Citrohan Houses” of the early 1920s, which featured raised ground floors, wide windows, roof terraces, open facades, open interior plans, and the use of reinforced concrete.<sup>41</sup> Le Corbusier continued to explore the inter-relationship between form, function, and materiality in the 1920s and 1930s. His design for the De Mandrot Villa (1931), near Hyères, shows the evolution of his approach and combined natural stone elevations with stucco, glass, and low, horizontal building forms with flat roofs.<sup>42</sup>

The Modern Movement began to slowly surface in Maryland and Harford County after 1930, representing the beginnings of a move away from the state’s cultural conservatism and its fixation on the Colonial Revival. Significant examples of modern architecture in the state prior to World War II included the planning and design of Greenbelt, Maryland; the design competition for the Goucher College campus; and the Glenn Martin Aircraft Factory in Middle River by Albert Kahn.<sup>43</sup> In 1938, the Bata Company, a Czechoslovakian building firm, developed a planned community in Belcamp, Maryland that featured a modernist factory, commercial center, office building, hotel, and worker houses. The houses were based on the design principles disseminated by Le Corbusier, who had designed the planned town of Zlin, Czechoslovakia in 1935 for the company’s founder Thomas Bata. Architectural historian Christopher Weeks has called Belcamp “the most important work of twentieth-century architecture in Harford County.”<sup>44</sup> The Bata Company buildings have unfortunately been demolished and the site has been redeveloped in recent years.

The emerging modernist aesthetic of the International Style greatly influenced house design in the U.S. during the mid-twentieth century. Emigres such as Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Louis Kahn, and Richard Neutra helped initiate a gradual transformation in American housing from gable-roofed bungalows with traditional floorplans to houses with modern lines, flat roofs, glass walls, and open-plan interiors. Neutra’s “Desert House” in Palm Springs, California (1945) features the sharp planar geometries of the International Style along with glazed curtain walled elevations shaded by deep roof overhangs. Other prominent examples of early postwar International-Style residences include Farnsworth House near Plano, Illinois by Mies van der Rohe (1945-1951) and Philip Johnson’s Glass House near New Canaan, Connecticut (1945-1949). More traditional concepts of home and housing continued to resonate with the public, however, and the Cape Cod cottage was the most popular house style during this period. The 1945 home-building show at the Museum of Modern Art, curated by Elizabeth Mock, sought to win over the skeptical public by presenting modern design as an approach to achieve a “better, healthier way of life,” a concept at the core of Poldi Hirsch’s philosophy.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Weeks, 191-92.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (1932; repr., New York: Norton, 1966), 127-33.

<sup>43</sup> Isabelle Gournay and Mary Corbin Sies, “Context Essay: Modern Movement in Maryland,” prepared for the Maryland Historical Trust and the Center for Architectural Design and Research, undated, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Weeks, 193-94.

<sup>45</sup> Weeks, 194; Leland M. Roth, *A History of American Architecture: Five Centuries of Building* (New York: West View Press, 1998), 316-19.

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Frank Lloyd Wright had an equally strong influence on residential design in America during the mid-twentieth century. His Usonian houses, developed before World War II, emerged as a conceptual template for much of the residential design in the country after 1945.<sup>46</sup> Wright looked to reinterpret the small single-family dwelling and make it compatible with modern lifestyles. Wright's Usonian houses embodied modern twentieth-century design principles while avoiding the repetition seen in the typical prefabricated housing of the era. This was achieved through varied plans and ceiling heights combined with flowing, open interiors that were a signature of his innovative approach.<sup>47</sup> Wright's Usonian houses were particularly influential in California, where there was an existing tradition of modern house design and a mild climate that favored his open-plan interiors. California architects such as Harwell Hamilton Harris adopted aspects of Wright's approach coupled with exposed timber frames, highly articulated roof structures, and natural materials in reference to the Craftsman Style and the Asian influences seen along the California coast.<sup>48</sup> In Harford County, Frank Lloyd Wright's ideas influenced the work of architect Duryea Cameron, who designed a small number of Usonian houses in the Bel Air area during the 1950s.<sup>49</sup>

After World War II, architectural modernism served as the idiom for the rapidly growing Maryland suburbs, embraced by politically powerful middle-class suburbanites and reflected in new schools, churches, shopping centers, commercial buildings, and residences.<sup>50</sup> Returning World War II veterans Walter Ward and Melvin Bosely developed residential neighborhoods of prefabricated modern housing in Harford County during the late 1940s and 1950s. Wakefield Meadows, located south of Bel Air and begun in 1954, consisted of standardized dwellings designed by architect Charles Goodman for the National Homes Corporation. The community's basic model house, the "Fleetwood" is a one-story house with low, horizontal massing, overhanging flat roof, and attached carport. A patterned masonry screen across the front elevation provides privacy while the rear elevation features large windows. The Fleetwood won a national design award in 1955. With the success of Wakefield Meadows came other subdivisions of modern factory produced houses in Harford County. These included Edgewood Meadows, which featured 700 housing units along with commercial and recreational uses, the upscale Glenwood development, Bel Forest, Paradise Heights, and Northwood. In 1959, the *Baltimore Sun* published a feature story on the residential "building boom" that was occurring in Harford County.<sup>51</sup>

### *The Design Philosophy of Poldi Hirsch*

In her custom-designed residences of the 1960s, Poldi Hirsch adopted a vernacular expression of modernism that merged technology with tradition and craft in its use of natural materials. These houses combined strong geometries of form with bold colors in an approach attuned to local

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<sup>46</sup> Roth, 314.

<sup>47</sup> Weeks, 199-200.

<sup>48</sup> Roth, 314-15.

<sup>49</sup> Weeks, 199-200.

<sup>50</sup> Gournay and Sies, 4-5.

<sup>51</sup> Weeks, 196-99.

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conditions, site characteristics, natural light, and ventilation. Through this approach, exemplified by 605 Giles Street, Hirsch followed in the direction established by Frank Lloyd Wright and Alvar Aalto, whose work explored the organic nature of materials. According to Italian architectural historian Selena Bagnara Milan, the Hirsch Residence, “illustrated Poldi’s conception of beauty, characterized by functionalism interwoven with rhythm, light, and color to create a vital and dynamic experience.” The interior layout and modernist use of glazing connects the interior with the outdoor surroundings – a hallmark of mid-century modern house design. The house also contained Poldi’s design studio and an office for meeting with clients, as well as an office for Dr. Hirsch, integrating home and work functions.<sup>52</sup> The front door and exterior closet, today painted bright yellow, were originally lavender in color.<sup>53</sup>

The influence of Frank Lloyd Wright is particularly evident in the design of the Hirsch Residence, which shares many similarities to Wright’s Usonian houses. Like 605 Giles Street, Usonian houses are often L-shaped to fit around a garden terrace or other outdoor feature. They often incorporated natural, local materials, and exhibited multi-height overlapping roof planes, cantilevered overhangs, and natural lighting with clerestory windows. These are all attributes seen in the Hirsch Residence from its use of local stone to its complex roof configuration and cantilevered front deck. Like Wright’s Herbert Jacobs House in Madison, Wisconsin (1937), the Hirsch Residence features clerestory windows in the kitchen and demonstrates a similar strategy for spatial arrangement, with the living room, dining room, kitchen, and den flowing together, and bedrooms located in a more private separate wing. At the time that Wright was designing his Usonian houses, formal dining had lost much of its prominence, and a table in the living room next to the kitchen was more convenient than a separate room, as seen in the Hirsch Residence. A strong visual connection between the interior and exterior spaces is a key characteristic of Usonian houses, as are carports, a term coined by Wright to describe an overhang for sheltering a parked vehicle. Wright’s Usonian houses also frequently featured an uncovered patio at the rear of the dwelling in the space formed by the L-plan, an approach which Hirsch incorporated into the design of 605 Giles Street.<sup>54</sup>

The Hirsch Residence also communicates the influence of the so-called “California Style,” typified by the work of architect Harwell Hamilton Harris. Like the Ralph Johnson Residence in Los Angeles (1949), the Hirsch Residence makes use of California redwood, and features a glass-walled living room, and exposed wood joists, posts, and rafters.<sup>55</sup> In a 2015 interview, Poldi Hirsch’s husband, Dr. Gunther Hirsch, described the Hirsch Residence as “California

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<sup>52</sup> Selena Bagnara Milan, “The Built Legacy of Poldi Hirsch: An European Architect Who Became an American Pioneer of the Modern Movement,” in *Women’s Creativity Since the Modern Movement (1918-2018): Toward a New Perception and Reception*, ed. Helena Serazin, Caterina Franchini, and Emilia Garda (Ljubljana, Slovenia: France Stele Institute of Art History, 2018), 635-36.

<sup>53</sup> Personal communication, Elaine Hirsch, April 8, 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Robert C. Twombly, *Frank Lloyd Wright: His Life and His Architecture* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1979), 241-46.

<sup>55</sup> Mary Mix Foley, *The American House* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 239.

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Style,” and added that “the idea was you bring the outside in and the inside out in a continuous flow, and you use natural materials.”<sup>56</sup>

The use of natural stone for the Hirsch Residence recalls the Eliot Noyes Residence in New Canaan, Connecticut (1957), designed by architect Eliot Noyes, who studied under Gropius at Harvard University. The Noyes Residence features stone side elevations that extend forward to screen the glazed front elevation, a technique used by Hirsch. The stone walls also help baffle winter winds and act to absorb solar heating.<sup>57</sup> For 605 Giles Street, Poldi Hirsch constructed much of the east and west elevations in stone, likely as a strategy to help keep the house cool in summer. Extending the stone west elevation to the south also provided greater privacy from neighbors.

A thorough modernist, Poldi Hirsch abhorred America’s continued embrace of the Colonial Revival Style after World War II. Dr. Gunther Hirsch recalled her frequently posing the question, “We are living in a modern era. Why don’t people buy modern houses?” Dr. Hirsch added that, “her houses had to fit a certain customer who had the same idea, who wanted a house that would fit in the twentieth century.” In addition to her custom designed homes, which are marked by their highly developed and original designs, Poldi Hirsch also designed a number of more modest speculative dwellings in Havre de Grace during the 1960s that were functional and affordable. She felt that houses should be built close together on smaller lots and was a proponent for density.<sup>58</sup>

As an architect-builder, Poldi Hirsch was concerned with the social dimension of residential design and how the organization and function of houses and apartment buildings could contribute to healthy family life. In this way, her work represented a modern, interdisciplinary approach that blended architecture and public health.<sup>59</sup> She shared this interest with her husband, Dr. Gunther Hirsch. After initially coming to the U.S., Gunther and Poldi Hirsch were exposed to the pollution and industrial grit of the densely populated Pittsburgh area, and experienced challenges in finding clean, hygienic, and affordable housing for their young family. As a medical student, Dr. Hirsch was interested in the intersection of “health and construction,” and he pitched the idea to his professors that working with his wife, they could help create healthy residential environments through better housing.<sup>60</sup> In his book, *Sick!*, Dr. Hirsch recalls that:

I explained that my wife was an architect and together we planned to design better affordable housing for the people. Good housing would promote better

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<sup>56</sup> Dr. Gunther Hirsch, interview.

<sup>57</sup> Foley, 256.

<sup>58</sup> Dr. Gunther Hirsch, interview.

<sup>59</sup> Milan, 630.

<sup>60</sup> Dr. Gunther Hirsch, interview.

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health... We thought we could establish a new branch of public health combining practical, inexpensive ideas of housing to provide a healthy environment.<sup>61</sup>

These ideas regarding the deterministic nature of architecture were not new, and during the nineteenth century, the relationship between housing conditions and public health was recognized by reformers and writers. Friedrich Engels decried the state of worker housing in Manchester, England during the 1840s, and Jacob Riis documented sub-standard living conditions in the tenements of New York City during the late nineteenth century. By the twentieth century, the links between housing and health continued to shape public health policy in the U.S., spearheaded by the Baltimore Health Department. The American Public Health Association began its involvement in public housing issues in 1937 with the formation of its Committee on Hygiene and Housing. During the 1940s, the Committee developed an assessment tool used to evaluate the health of housing that informed and guided urban planning efforts during the ensuing decades.<sup>62</sup>

The townhouse duplexes, apartment buildings, and detached single-family residences designed by Poldi Hirsch provided a high standard of living to families at affordable cost. Her designs combined the minimalist aesthetic of the Modern Movement with the functionality of the traditional home. Aspects of her designs such as the allocation of interior space in a systematic and interrelated manner, the use of durable materials, and maximum exposure to sunlight for living spaces, were intended to create healthy living environments at low cost. These attributes are found in the duplex apartment building at 715-725 Lewis Street in Havre de Grace (1963), which served as the Hirsch family home for many years prior to the construction of 605 Giles Street. Hirsch further combined these principles of modernity, public health, and affordability in later works such as the duplex building at 710 Lewis Street (1967). Served by a central staircase, the two-story units featured double-height living rooms that faced balconies with street views and were equipped with built-in furniture. Architectural historian Selena Bagnara Milan has noted that Hirsch's duplex buildings reflect the design solutions developed by Le Corbusier in his *Unité d'Habitation* residential high-rise buildings of the 1940s in Marseille, France.<sup>63</sup> Like many twentieth-century architects, Poldi Hirsch admired Le Corbusier, whose books and published drawings inspired a generation of designers. In addition, the maxim "form follows function," first expressed by American architect Louis Sullivan in 1896, was a central aspect of her guiding philosophy.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

Poldi Hirsch was among a small number of pioneering female architects practicing in Maryland after World War II, a period when women constituted a small percentage of the nation's

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<sup>61</sup> Gunther Hirsch, *Sick! Patients First: A Refreshing Dose of the Right Medicine for an Ailing Medical System* (Raleigh, NC: Outer Banks Publishing, 2012), 35-39.

<sup>62</sup> James Krieger and Donna L. Higgins, "Housing and Health: Time Again for Public Health Action," *American Journal of Public Health* 92, no. 5 (2002): 760-61.

<sup>63</sup> Milan, 635.

<sup>64</sup> Dr. Gunther Hirsch, interview.

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professional architects. Women architects such as Poldi Hirsch faced numerous roadblocks in advancing their careers in what was at the time still a male dominated profession. Hirsch, educated in Switzerland prior to immigrating to the U.S. with her family after the war, established a successful career as an architect in Havre de Grace during the 1960s through her talent and determination. The Hirsch Residence is an enduring statement in mid-century modern residential design and was featured in the *Baltimore Sun* in 1973 as the residential “showpiece” of postwar Havre de Grace. In designing the functional, modern dwelling for her family, Poldi Hirsch incorporated a variety of Modern Movement influences ranging from the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, the International Style, and West Coast vernacular architecture. Hirsch, in tandem with her physician husband, sought to improve the living conditions and health of families through her residential designs. The Hirsch residence is significant for its place in the historic context of women architects in Maryland after World War II, and the house is an important example of modern residential architecture in Harford County.

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Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: Maryland Historical Trust

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** HA-2290

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 0.44

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                      |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 39.540017 | Longitude: 76.094318 |
| 2. Latitude: 39.540024 | Longitude: 76.093857 |
| 3. Latitude: 39.539642 | Longitude: 76.093849 |
| 4. Latitude: 39.539635 | Longitude: 76.094310 |

Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

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**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The eastern ten feet of Lot 54, all of Lot 53, and the western twenty feet of Lot 52, in Block 4 of the Bloomsbury Park subdivision, constituting Tax Parcel 1863 (Tax Map 0602).

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries contain the original property owned by Dr. Gunther and Poldi Hirsch on which the Hirsch Residence was built in 1969-1970.

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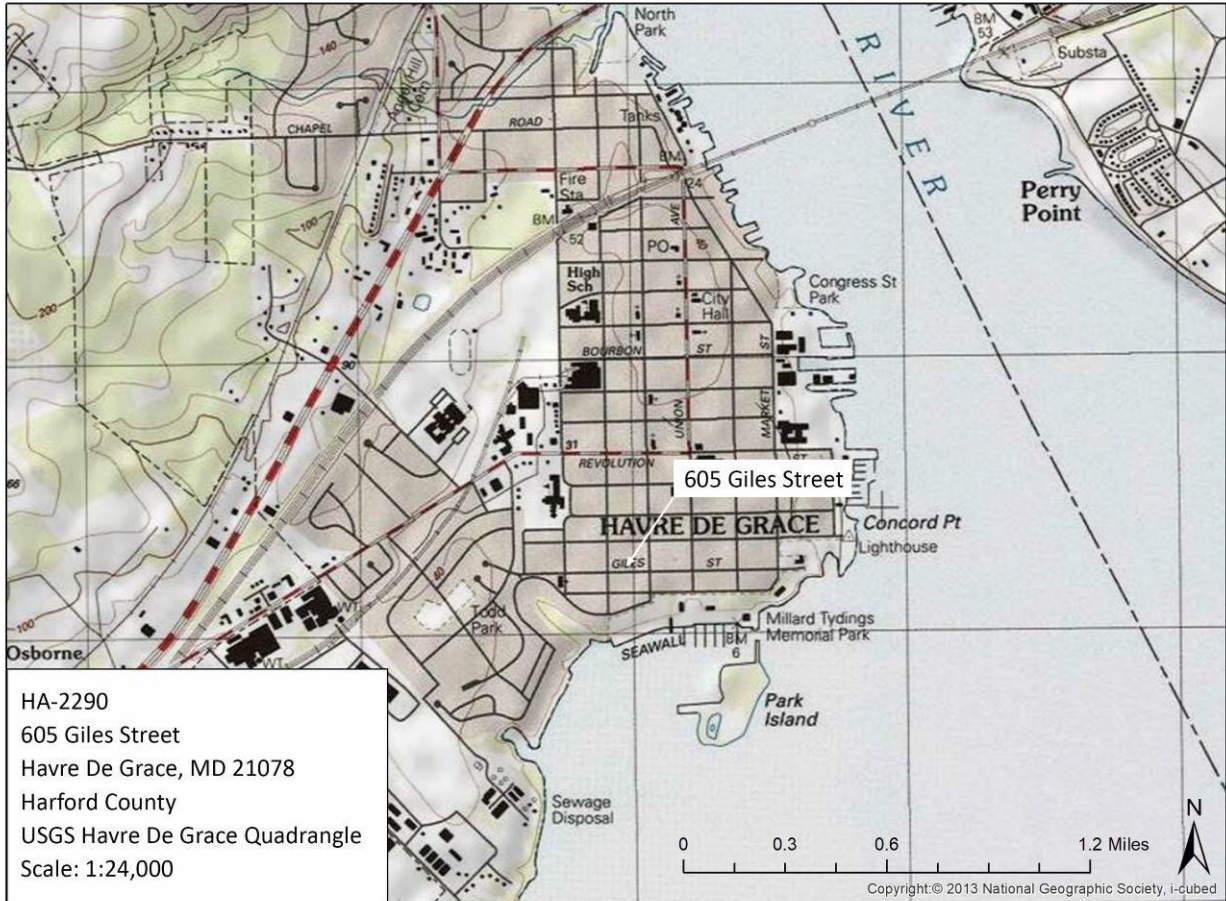
**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: John Gentry, Senior Architectural Historian  
organization: EHT Tracerics, Inc.  
street & number: 440 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
city or town: Washington state: DC zip code: 20001  
e-mail john.gentry@tracerics.com  
telephone: (202) 393-1199  
date: May 2022

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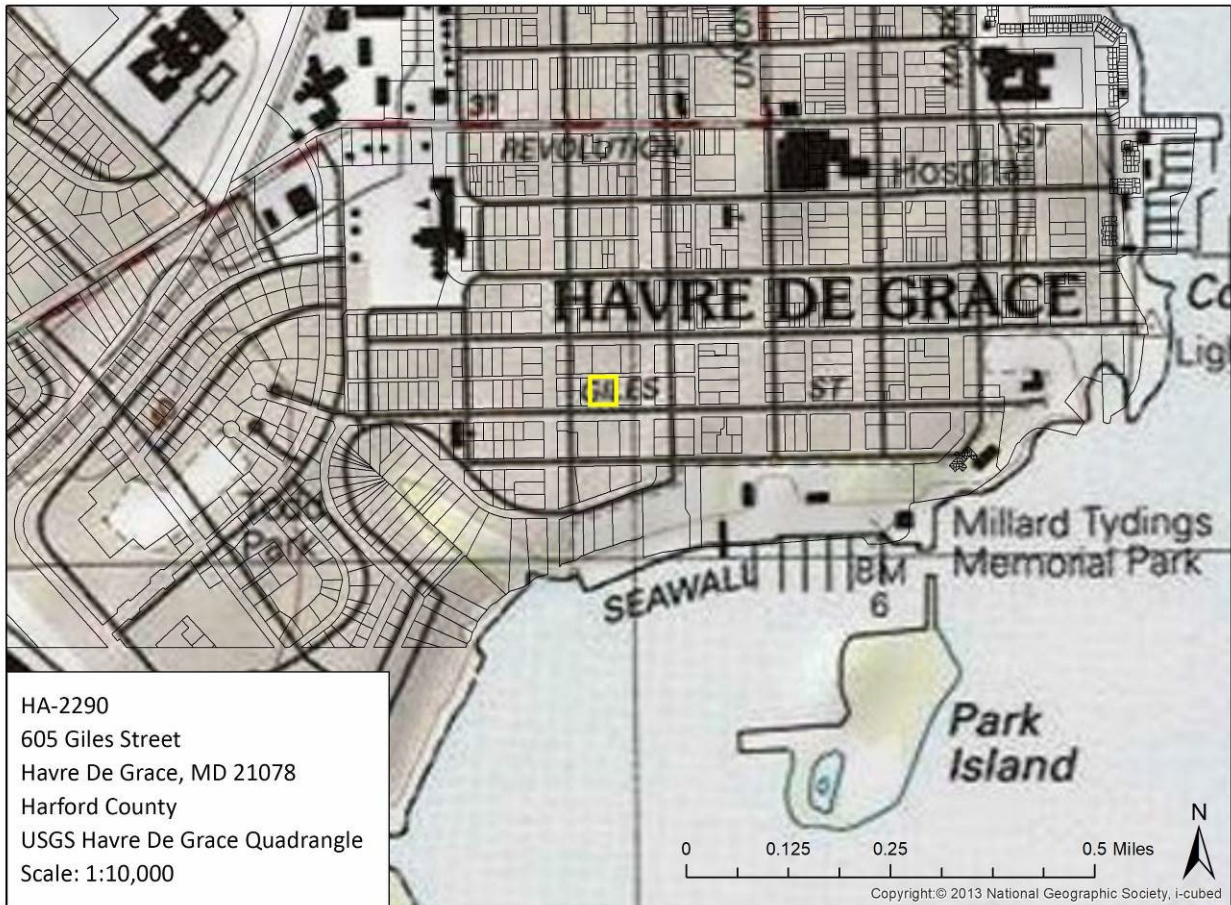
**Additional Documentation**



**Figure 1.** Locator map at 1:24,000 scale with property annotated (ESRI)

Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

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**Figure 2.** Locator map at 1:10,000 scale with property annotated (ESRI)

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County and State

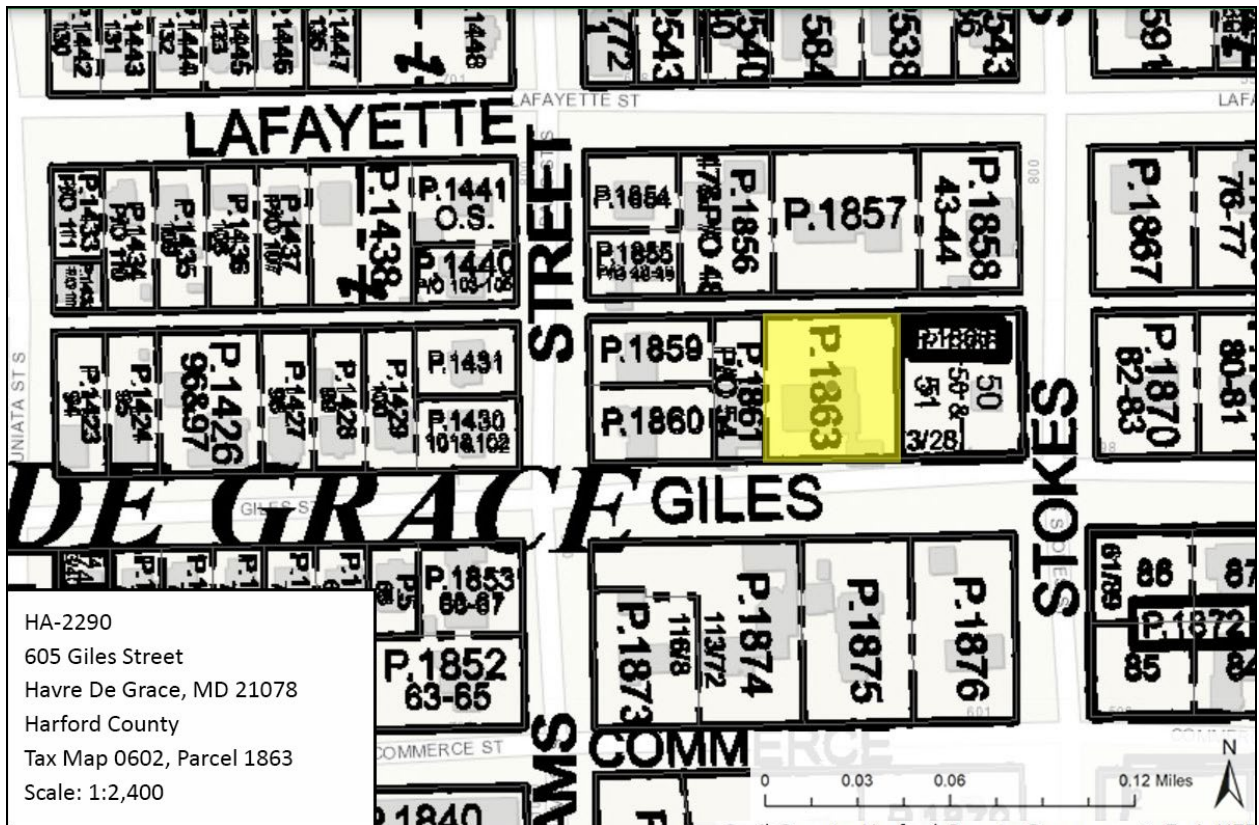
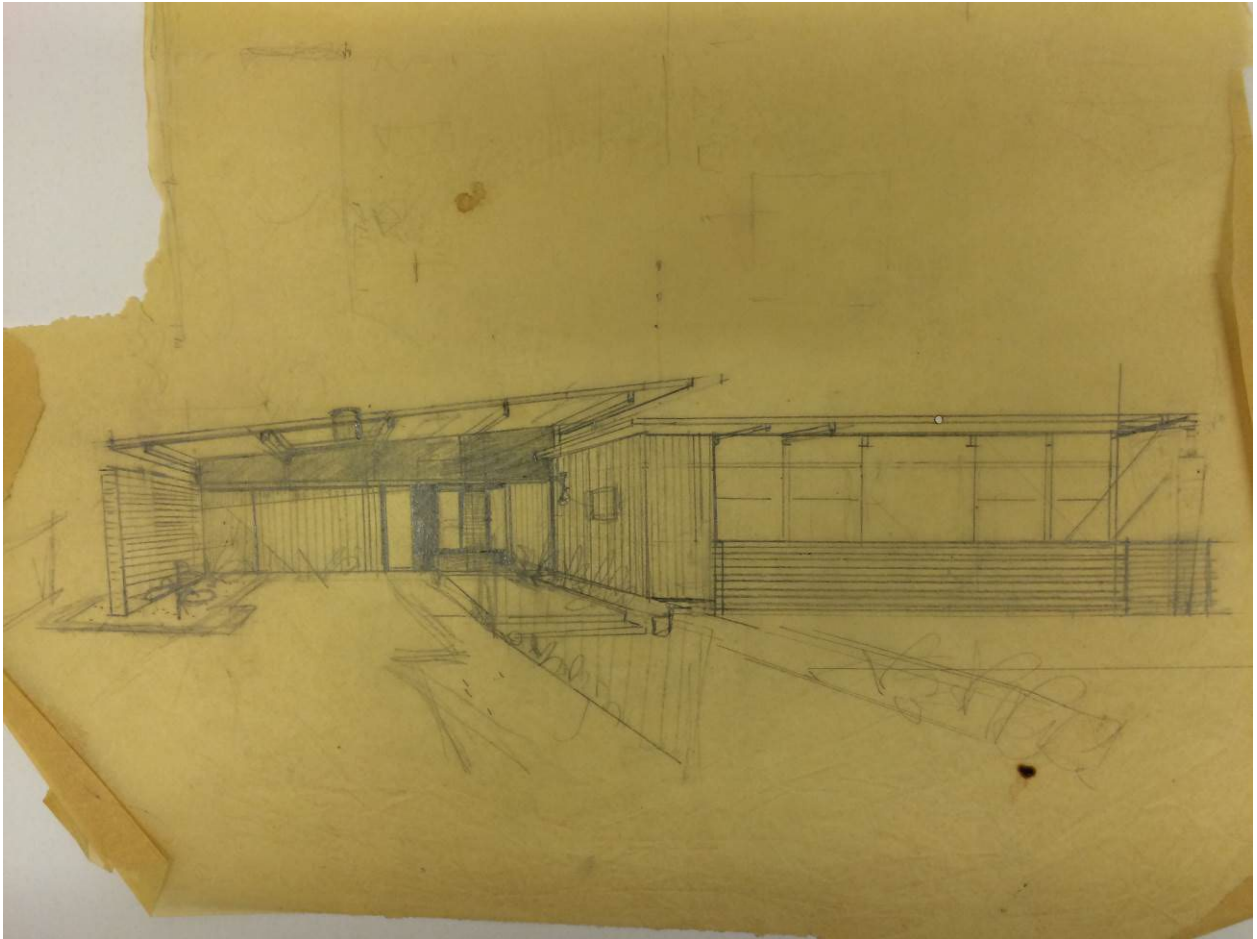


Figure 3. Tax map at 1:2,400 scale with tax parcel annotated (ESRI)

Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

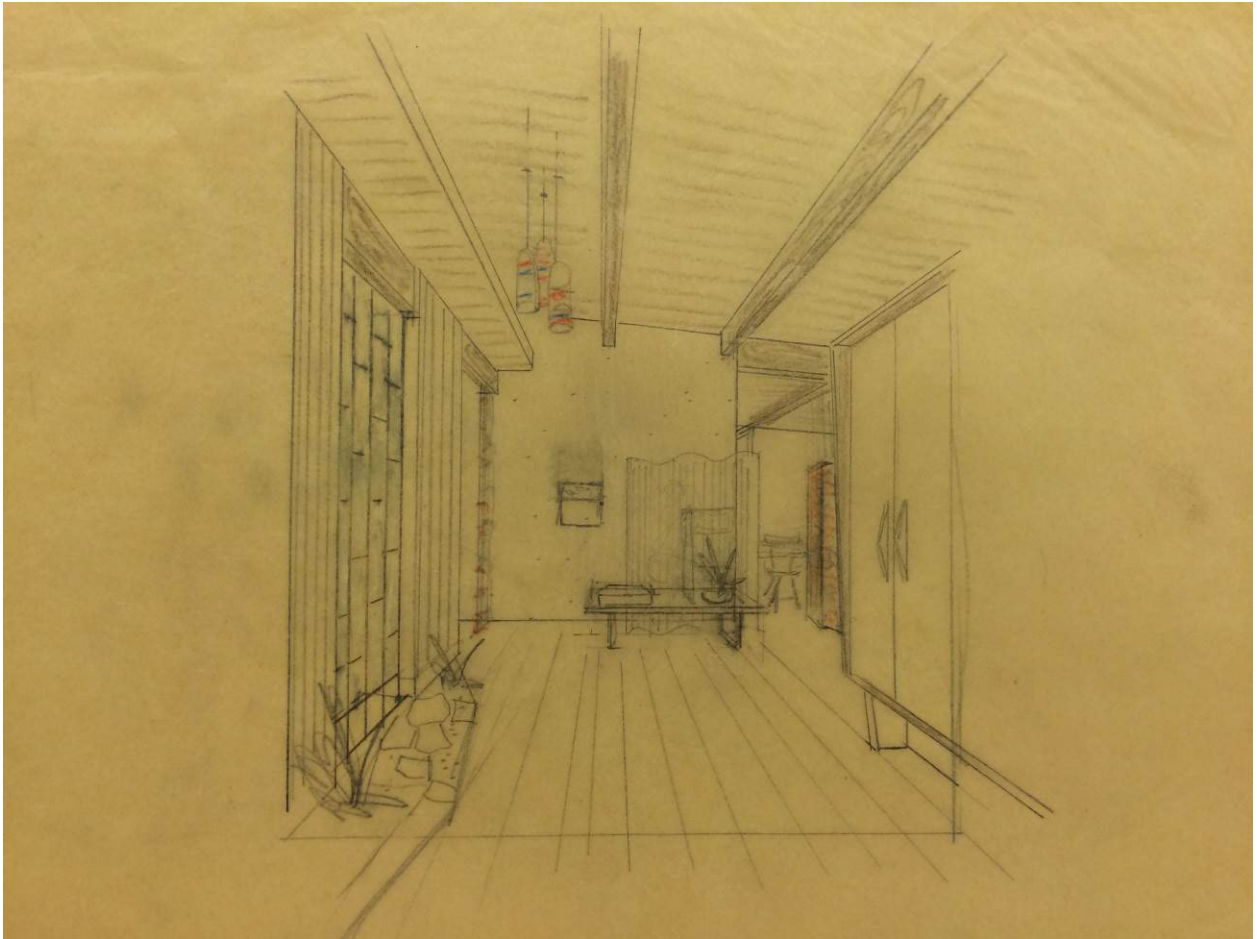
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County and State



**Figure 4.** Concept sketch for the Hirsch Residence, undated (Hirsch Family)

Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

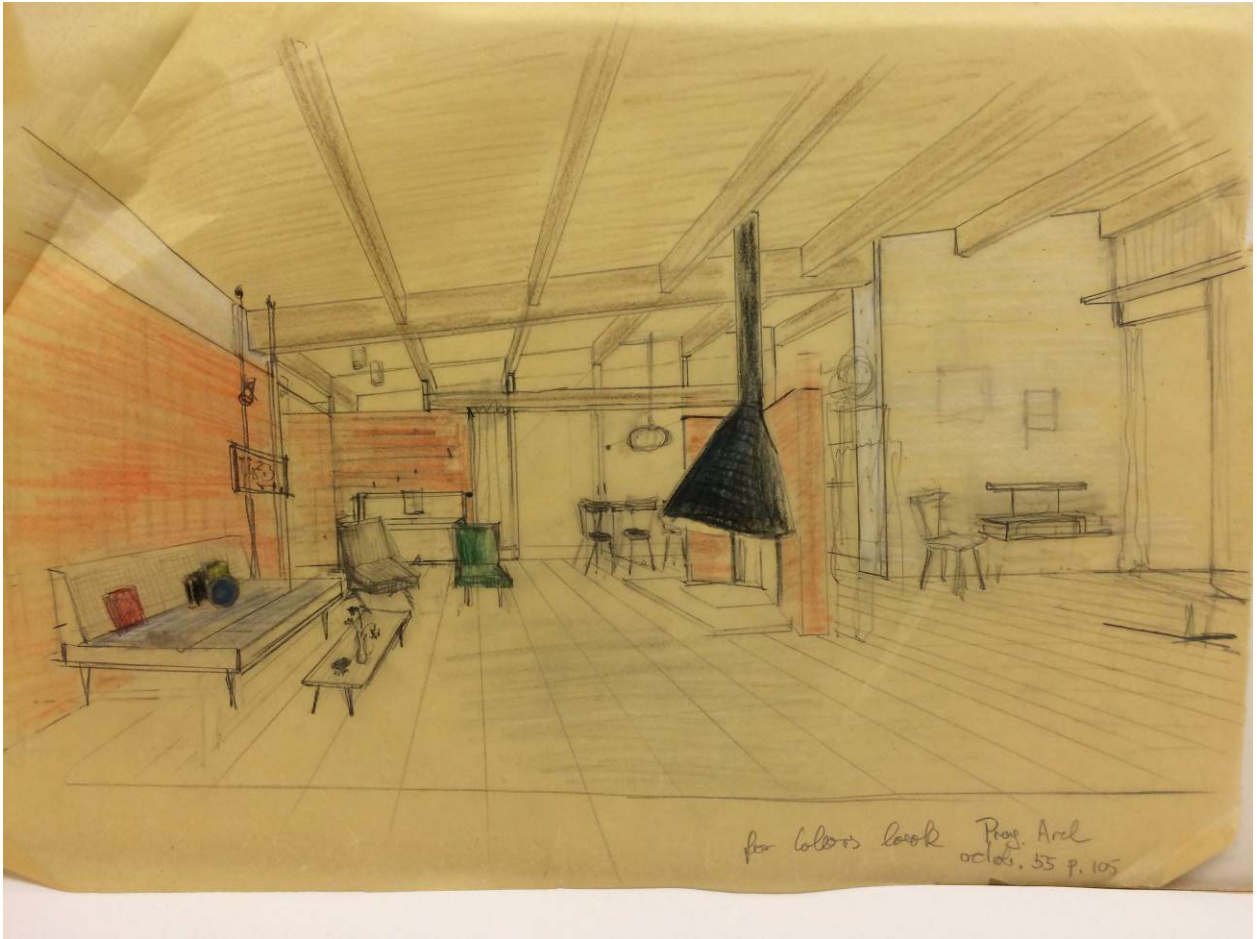
Harford County, MD  
County and State



**Figure 5.** Concept sketch for the Hirsch Residence, undated (Hirsch Family)

Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

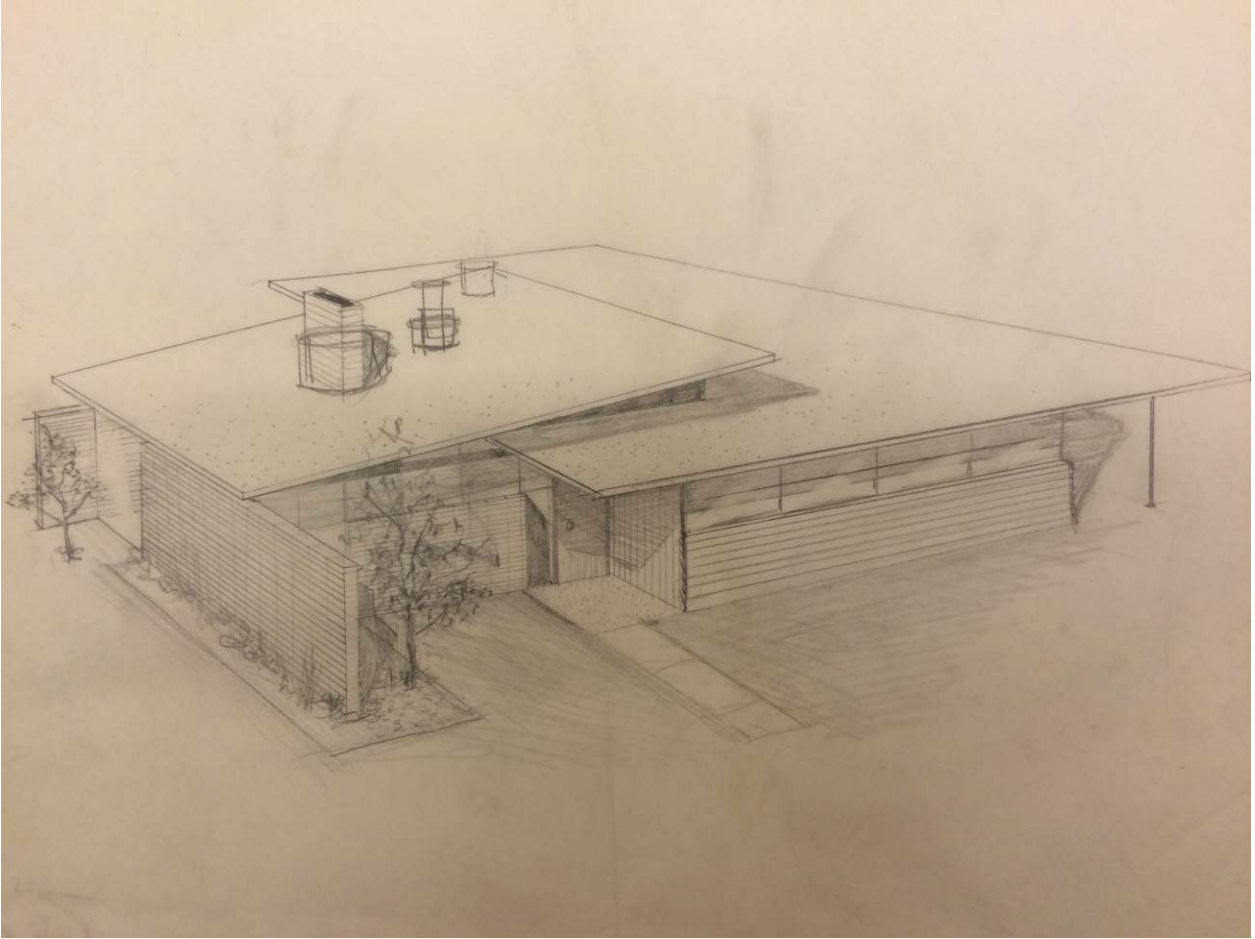
Harford County, MD  
County and State



**Figure 6.** Concept sketch for the Hirsch Residence, undated (Hirsch Family)

Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

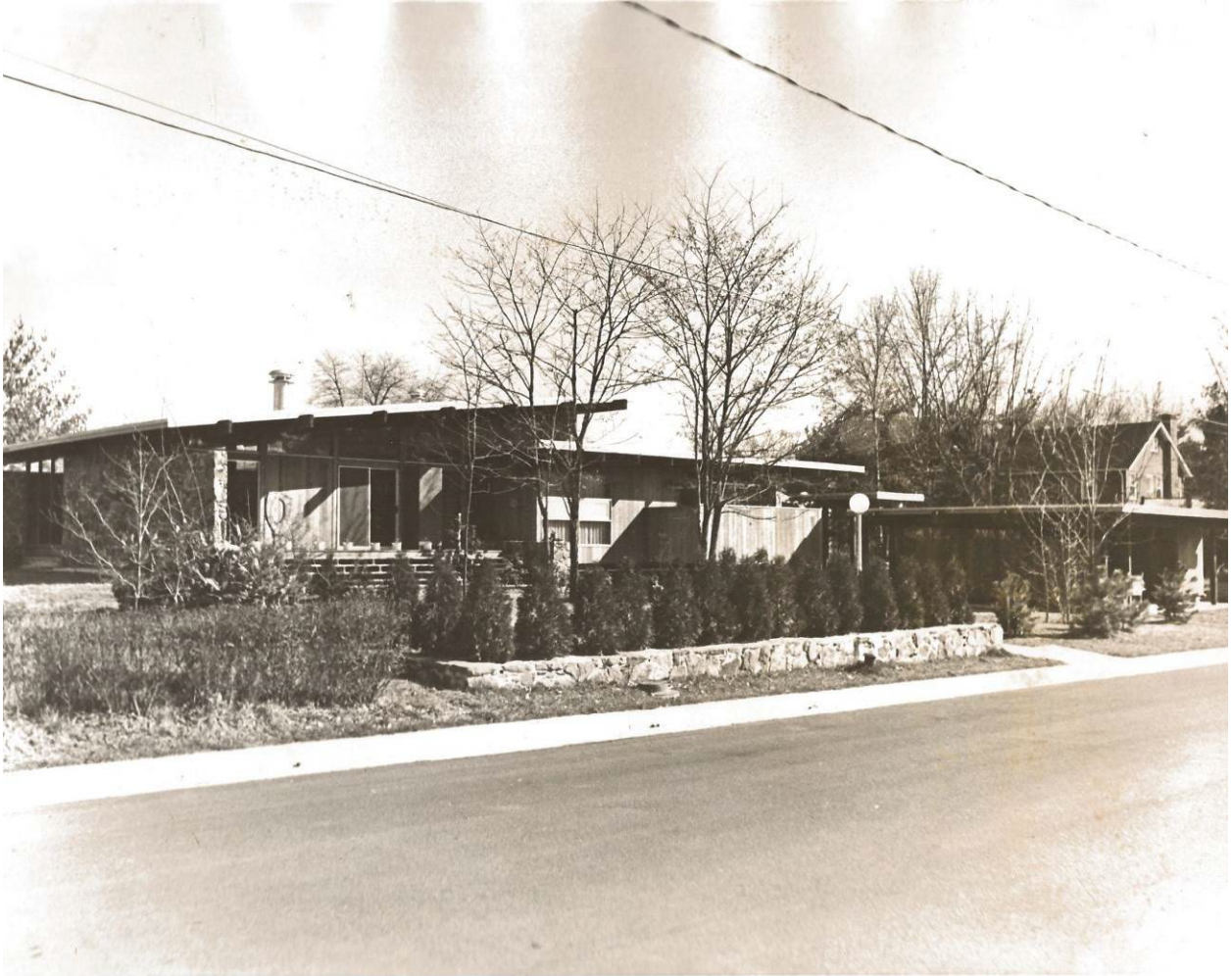
Harford County, MD  
County and State



**Figure 7.** Concept sketch for the Hirsch Residence, undated (Hirsch Family)

Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

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**Figure 8.** Front elevation and carport, c. 1970 (Hirsch Family)

Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
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**Figure 9.** Front elevation, *Baltimore Sun*, December 16, 1973.

Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

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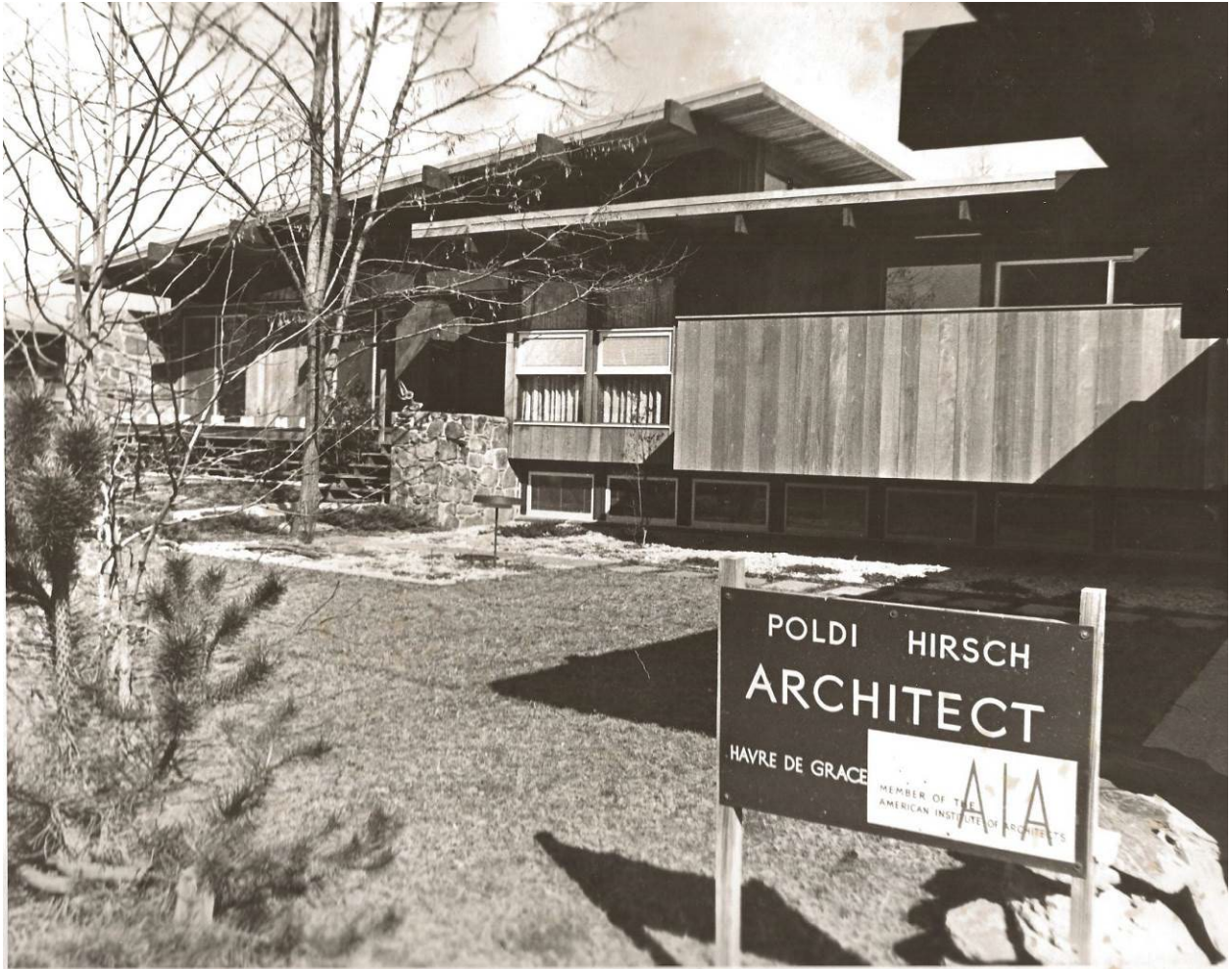


Figure 10. Front elevation, c. 1970 (Hirsch Family)

Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

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**Figure 11.** Den, *Baltimore Sun*, December 16, 1973.

Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
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**Figure 12.** Living room, *Baltimore Sun*, December 16, 1973.

Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

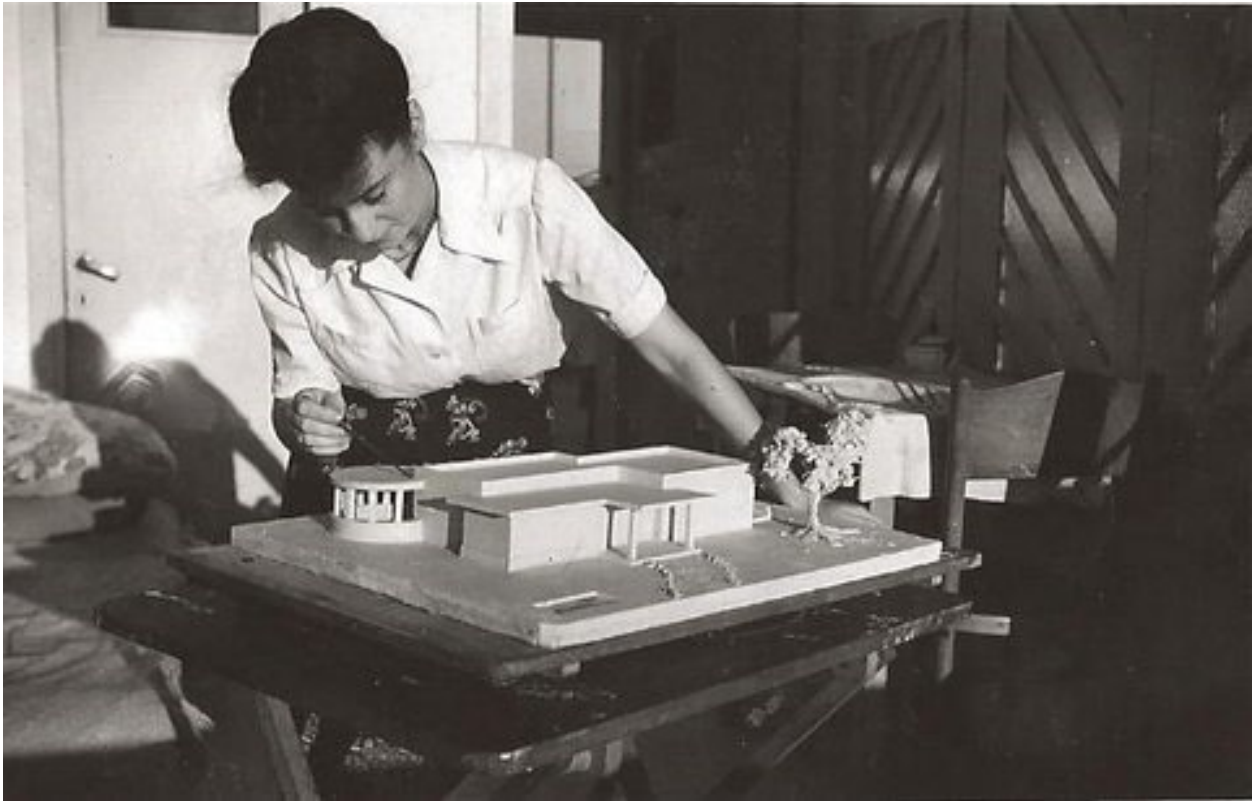
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**Figure 13.** Poldi Hirsch standing in the dining room, *Baltimore Sun*, December 16, 1973.

Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

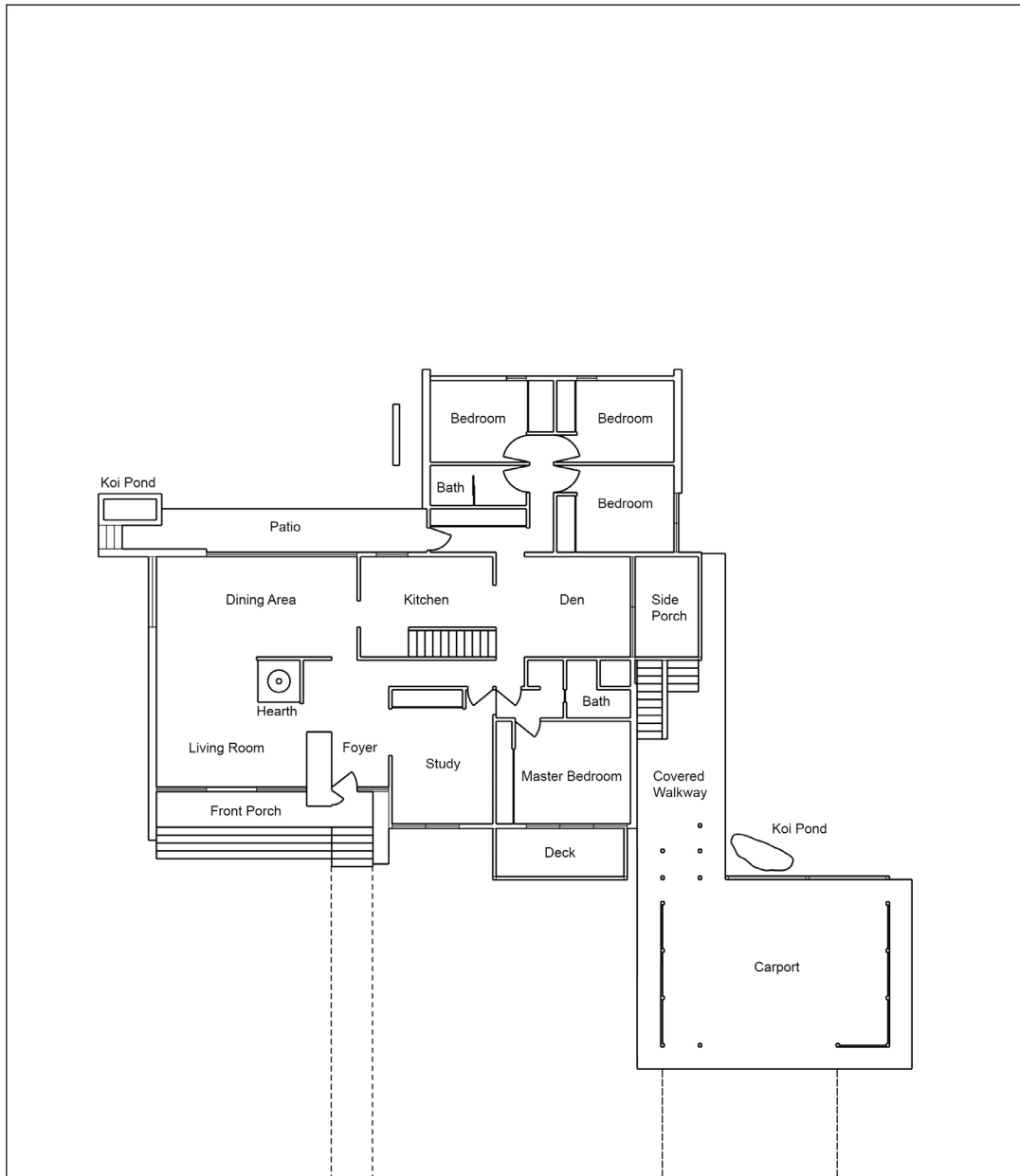
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**Figure 14.** Poldi Hirsch preparing an architectural model, c. 1960s (Hirsch Family)

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Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
605 Giles Street  
Havre de Grace, MD  
July 2022



Scale: 1 inch = 7.5 feet

**Figure 15.** First-floor floorplan, Hirsch Residence (EHT Traceries)

Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

Harford County, MD  
County and State

**Photographs**

**Photo Log**

Name of Property: Hirsch Residence

City or Vicinity: Havre de Grace

County: Harford

State: MD

Photographer: Sarah Vonesh, EHT Tracerics, Inc.

Date Photographed: April 8, 2022

Photo #1 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0001 south elevation, looking north



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

Harford County, MD  
County and State

Photo #2 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0002 south elevation, looking northwest



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

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Photo #3 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0003 garage, west elevation, looking east



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

Harford County, MD  
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Photo #4 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0004 east elevation, looking north



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
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Photo #5 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence 0005 east elevation, looking west



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

Harford County, MD  
County and State

Photo #6 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0006 north elevation, looking south



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
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Photo #7 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0007 north and west elevations, looking southeast



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

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Photo #8 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0008 west elevation, looking east



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

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County and State

Photo #9 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0009 west elevation, looking north



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

Harford County, MD  
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Photo #10 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0010 south elevation, looking northeast



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

Harford County, MD  
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Photo #11 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0011 inside front entrance, looking southwest



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

Harford County, MD  
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Photo #12 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0012 living room, looking west



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

Harford County, MD  
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Photo #13 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0013 living room and hearth, looking northeast



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

Harford County, MD  
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Photo #14 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0014 dining room, looking east



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

Harford County, MD  
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Photo #15 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0015 dining room and entrance foyer, looking south



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

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Photo #16 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0016 kitchen, looking west



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

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Photo #17 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0017 kitchen, hall, and basement stair entrance, looking southwest



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

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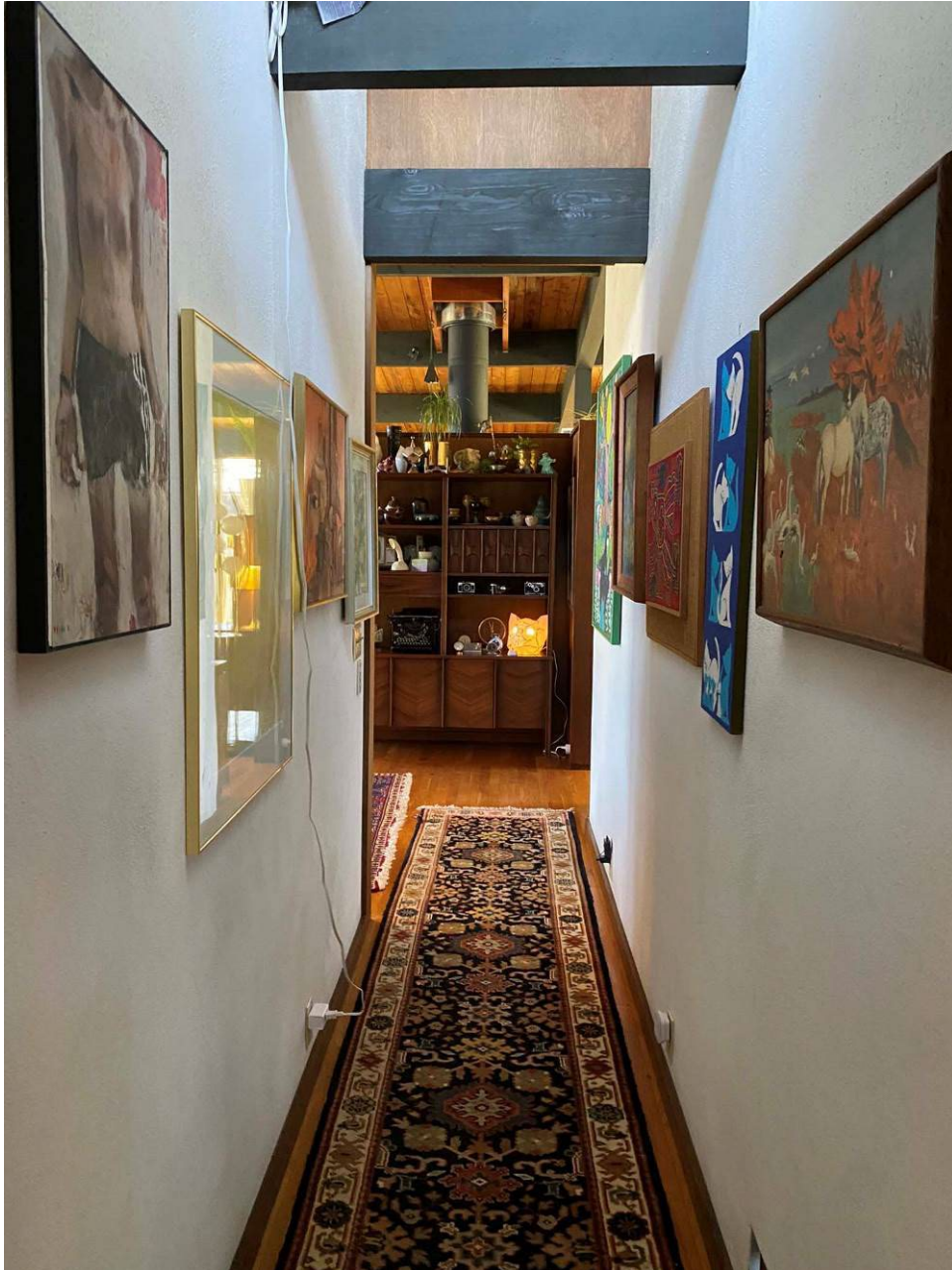
Photo #18 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0018 den, looking east



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

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Photo #19 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0019 hall, looking west



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

Harford County, MD  
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Photo #20 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0020 master bedroom, looking southeast



Hirsch Residence (HA-2290)  
Name of Property

Harford County, MD  
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Photo #21 MD\_Harford County\_Hirsch Residence\_0021 office, looking north



**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.