

Dallas, Texas, in the middle of the 20th century. One would be hard pressed to find a better spot to call home. Its people, the war behind them, were optimistic about the future. Shining towers like the Republic Bank Building and the Mercantile Tower were transforming downtown. Central Expressway had replaced the old Central railroad tracks, making huge swaths of undeveloped land to the north easily accessible and ripe for a dynamic city's growth. There was a sense that all was right with the world and that anything was possible. And it was.

Grady Vaughn Jr. believed that. He had seen what his father had accomplished with just a diploma from Wilton High School in Arkansas, a lot of hard work, and a fierce confidence to succeed. He'd heard his father tell of his early days working on a ranch, before moving on to roughneck in the oil patches of Louisiana. He saw his father's determination as he rose from the grit of the oilfields, steadily rising up the ranks: roughneck, driller, superintendent, and then taking the bold leap to starting his own drilling and production companies. By the time Grady Vaughn Jr. graduated from Dallas's Woodrow Wilson High School in 1941, his dad had gained renown for his successful ventures in oil and gas production. Grady Jr. and his brother Jack followed in their father's footsteps, learning the business from the ground up.

Grady Vaughn Sr. loved Dallas and helped build it. He was a founder of the Dallas Petroleum Club, served the Defense Department as regional petroleum director in WWII, and built and equipped a new department of physical therapy at Baylor Hospital. Following a stroke in 1947, he turned more responsibilities to his sons, who were as independent and driven as their dad. They diversified the family interests with insurance, real estate, ranching and media holdings. When Grady Sr. died in 1955 at just 61 years old, those who paid tribute to him exemplified his stature as a builder of Dallas. Oilmen Ed Cox and Ray Hubbard, among others, served as pallbearers at his funeral.

As a tribute to their father, the Vaughn brothers stepped in as the next generation of community leaders and civic builders. Grady Sr.'s generation built with bricks and stone; Grady Jr.'s with steel and glass in places like Austin, Corpus Christi, Midland and of course Dallas. When the gleaming, 15-story Vaughn Building opened at 1712 Commerce Street in 1957, Jack and Grady Jr. dedicated it to their father's memory.

Perhaps Grady Jr. was a frustrated architect or maybe he was taken by the jet-age architecture springing up around the country. He and his wife Dorothy traveled frequently through Southern California and certainly observed a new “California Casual” style of homes inspired by a new movement of prairie home architecture inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright. But whatever influenced him, he decided, while the Vaughn Building was just sketches on paper, that he would build a new kind of home for Dorothy and their sons, Grady III and Gary. He wanted a residence that would reflect his energetic optimism and growing success.

The city was spreading northward at a rapid pace. Land that for millennia had been rich black land prairie was being transformed into home sites for a new generation of Dallasites. It was here, in scenic Preston Hollow, that Grady Jr. decided to build the family home. He selected one of the few remaining lots in Dentwood, historically, the site of theater impresario Louis Dent’s country estate. Marketed in the early 1940s as a “picturesque and rustic tract,” the subdivision had gradually filled in with spectacular homes built by Dallas notables including oilman Paul Scott, builder Jack Neece, retailer Harold Volk and architects William Lang and George Dahl. In 1957, O’Neil Ford designed the now iconic home for TI co-founder Patrick Haggerty that backs up to the property.

Vaughn selected a placid tract bordering a quiet lake dotted with ancient live oak trees. For its design, he tapped Robert Donovan Goodwin, a Temple native who had arrived in Dallas in 1932. By 1936, he and architect Herbert Tatum had opened a firm in downtown’s Burt Building and won acclaim that year for the design of the Southern Pine House, a model home of the future, for Dallas’s world’s fair, the Texas Centennial Exposition. Goodwin helped found the Dallas Registered Architects Association, and his peers and friends read like a who’s-who of Dallas architectural history: O’Neil Ford, George Dahl, Arch Swank and Mark Lemmon.

Goodwin’s early commissions centered largely in the Park Cities and were wholly traditional designs, popular at the time. Dozens of compact Tudors, Craftsmen and Colonial homes were sketched on his drafting table. Among his residential projects were the homes he designed for baseball legend Dizzy Dean at 4421 Arcady and the Henry Strasburger home at 3500 Rock Creek Drive. He planned the Bradfield and Armstrong Elementary Schools for the Highland Park School District and the Greenway Parks and Peabody Elementary Schools for the DISD. On the

commercial side, he planned buildings for Doran Chevrolet and Southwest Airmotive.

Worthy architects keep up with trends and technologies and dare to be bold with the advance of time. Goodwin was attuned to the changing world around him that reflected the progressive buoyancy of American life. A dramatic postwar shift occurred and it could be seen everywhere. Cars sported sharp fins and undulating curves. Television replaced radio as Americans' primary entertainment source. Gadgets and appliances, borne out of wartime necessity, now eased the drudgery of housework for homemakers everywhere. Even the architecture radiated the exuberance of the dawn of the new era and Robert Goodwin embraced it.

By 1951, Goodwin was principal in a new firm, Goodwin and Cavitt. No one knows for sure what led Grady Vaughn to select Goodwin to design his new home, but the collaboration yielded what might be the most significant example of mid-century residential architecture in Dallas. Wrapped along the lazy curve of a small lake where the Straight Branch creek was dammed, the sprawling 9,500 square foot home at 5350 Dentwood Drive emerged from the wooded site as if inherently connected to the land itself, its exterior of buff brick a natural extension of the landscape surrounding it. Majestic trees, many of them a century or more old, shaded the home in dappled sunlight.

It was clear that the Vaughns built the house for entertaining. A wide entrance foyer opened dramatically into a massive living area flooded with light from floor to ceiling sliding doors framing a striking view of the pond. The Vaughns' son Grady III was a child when his family built the house. He remembered, "There was a feeling of nature being a part of the house. Those massive sliding doors brought the outside indoors. My parents did a lot of entertaining here," he continued, "you would recognize the names of the many people they had in that house." Titans of industry, notable public officials, and Hollywood celebrities all passed its doors. A news report from 1963 describes just one of the elaborate festivities. Noting the Vaughns were "know-how party-givers," it continued, describing the décor in unabashed Mad Men-era splendor:

The entire yard was planted with azaleas and Debutante camellias, and a life size St. Francis, banked with doves, camellias and azaleas, stood at the door. Other decorations...included live white doves in a large cage; a 6-foot velvet rose tree brightened with velvet doves, and garlands of laurel roping caught in

swags by velvet doves. Life-size Renaissance angels were used in the stairwell and elegant arrangements of fresh Happiness roses and lilies were used in the music room where Mr. and Mrs. Jim Harmon presented everything from Bach to "White Christmas" at twin pianos.

The Dallas Morning News, December 5, 1963

The Vaughns could certainly throw a party.

Despite the home's sprawling footprint, it was at its core, a family home. "Dallas in the 1950s was special," Grady Vaughn III said, "it was a smaller place. Everyone knew each other and this neighborhood was a wonderful place to be a kid. We played outside all the time. All the neighborhood kids knew one another and our parents did too."

The house contained four bedrooms, including a massive master suite replete with endless built-in closets, cabinets, and drawers, all of which have remained intact, and quarters above the kitchen. The rooms flowed seamlessly from one to another due to the curved nature of the home's design. "You'd be hard pressed to find a right angle in that house," said Vaughn. No detail was too small for Goodwin's plan: brass, bullet-shaped hinges on every door, paneled storage areas that blended flawlessly into walls, and subtle, beveled trim and bannisters.

Grady Jr. and Dorothy left their influences on the home as well. Mr. Vaughn's knowledge of construction techniques ensured that the home was solidly built. "It was built like a fortress," his son recalled. Mrs. Vaughn, her 1950s aesthetic firmly in place, decorated the interiors with a mix of modern furnishings, early Chinese art objects, pieces of modern sculpture and her personal collection of artwork by regional artists Kelly Fearing and Bernique Longley.

Sadly, the Vaughn family's time in their dream home was brief. In the spring of 1967, little more than a decade after the home was completed, Mrs. Vaughn died. Her husband survived her by just four months. The following year, Milton Stevens, chairman of Dallas's Texlite Industries Corporation, purchased the house, but he too, died just a year later.

With Mr. Stevens' death, 5350 S. Dentwood was on the market again. An advertisement for the house ran in *The Dallas Morning News* in the spring of 1970:

"One of Dallas' Finest Homes"

DENTWOOD ESTATES

Custom designed and built with the finest materials available. Unsurpassed kitchen and breakfast room. Two bedroom suite downstairs, 2 bedrooms, 2 baths up. Large swimming pool with lovely lanai, dressing rooms and bath. A breathtaking view of beautiful trees and flowing creek from every room.

The Dallas Morning News, March 8, 1970

Enter Allan Zidell. A successful, self-made man, Zidell, like Goodwin, was a native of Temple. As a child, he worked in his family's general merchandise store until leaving for Austin, where he earned a business degree at the age of 19 from UT. He and his wife, Joyce, started a family and moved to Dallas in 1954. He started the Zidell Property and Construction Company at a time when housing development was exploding. He was responsible for building several thousand apartment units and dozens of commercial structures in the booming Dallas economy.

His family grew in step with his business. He and Joyce began to look for a larger home for their five children and when a realtor showed them the home on Dentwood, they knew it would be perfect for their family. Over the next generation, a new family's memories would be made there. Once again, children's voices rang through the house. Allan and Joyce's children and their cousins remember summer days of splashing in the pool and rowboat adventures in the lake. The boys loved fishing from its banks, watching the turtles lazily sunning themselves, and racing go carts around the driveways (and sometimes Dentwood Drive itself!). All the Zidell kids fondly remember the fun of playing in the home's elevator. Sundays inevitably meant hamburgers and steaks cooked by Allan himself, on the patio's built-in barbecue grill, and all of the Zidells, extended family included, gathered at the home on holidays and special occasions.

The Zidell kids grew up and left home to start families of their own and the house became quiet again. Allan Zidell died in the spring of 2016, and reluctantly, the family decided to sell the family home. "We're sad to see it go," said Michael Zidell, Allan's son. Time may march on, but the unique house at 5350 Dentwood Drive sits patiently by, waiting for the next chapter of family memories to be made within its walls.