

One of the problems with innovative residential design is that progressive aesthetics don't always stand the test of time. Developers and homeowners usually seek out the easiest and most inexpensive solutions to maintain a structure, rather than focus on preserving the integrity of the original design. And when it comes to preserving a historically significant home, there are few who have both the enthusiasm and the means to give it their all.

This was the case in Raleigh, North Carolina, for example, where a 1954 Eduardo Catalano house (informally known as the Potato Chip House) was demolished in 2001, due not to apathy but to the simple fact that the swooping hyperbolic paraboloid roof would have taken thousands of dollars to repair—if such a restoration were even possible. So when the opportunity arose to save a neighboring house designed by Catalano's colleague, architect George Matsumoto, the fire was already lit under

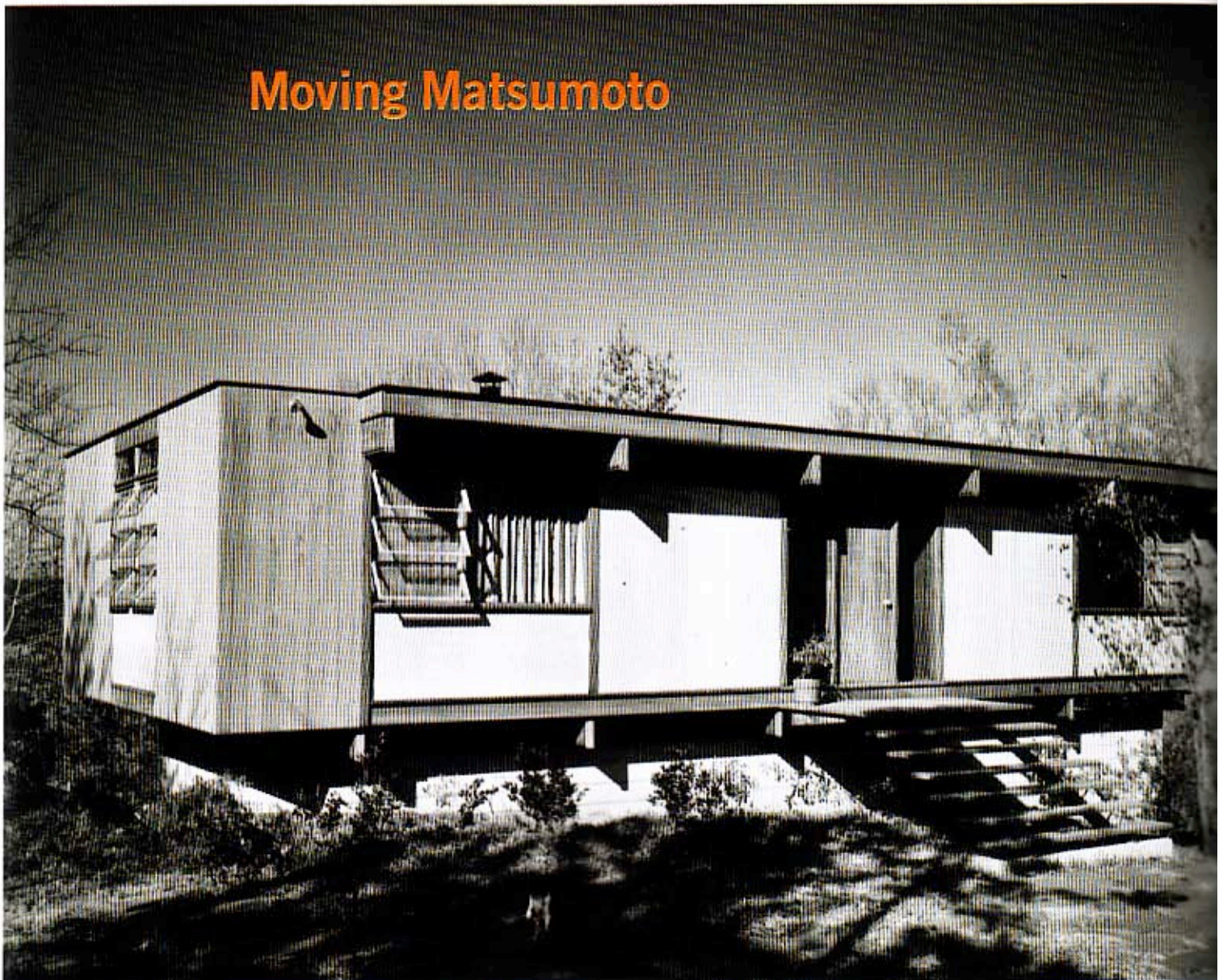
local architecture enthusiasts: They weren't going to let the same mistake happen again.

Back in 1954, Dr. George Poland wanted a house identical to the one Matsumoto had built for his own family—small, Asian-inspired, and modern. Both men were professors at North Carolina State University; Matsumoto was on the faculty at the School of Design, Poland the head of the modern language department. After some discussion between the two men, it became clear that the preliminary plan would need some altering. Instead of replicating his own home design, Matsumoto elaborated on it to create a smaller custom home for his client, one that included a modest kitchen, two discrete bedrooms, and plenty of space for entertaining.

By the time Poland passed away nearly a half-century later, the original site's rolling hills and view of Raleigh's Crabtree Valley had become crowded by a mall, hotel, and gas station, causing the land value to appreciate ▶

On its original site in Raleigh, North Carolina, the Poland house faced the street. The lot, which once overlooked a creek and rolling pastures, was overrun by a mall, hotel, and gas station.

Moving Matsumoto





while simultaneously making the location undesirable for residential life. Local commercial zoning changes—not to mention the house's deteriorating roof—seemed to guarantee the Poland residence's imminent demise.

In an effort to preserve the structure, Poland's heirs donated the home to Preservation North Carolina (PNC) in 2001. Not long after, modern-architecture enthusiast Don DeFeo toured the house and fell in love. But PNC would only consider an offer that included a suitable lot and a reasonable plan for moving the structure. "I knew we had a lot of work ahead of us," said DeFeo.

Not far from the original site, DeFeo discovered a 25-acre parcel of farmland featuring wildflower-strewn meadows, a pine forest, and, most important, a gently sloping hill that would allow the house to be integrated with its site, as Matsumoto's design had originally intended.

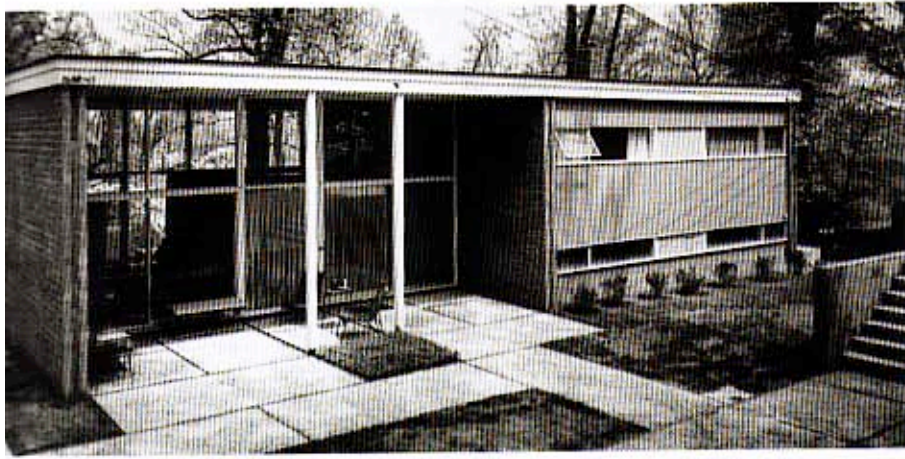
DeFeo then hired architect Ellen Cassilly to oversee the renovation, design a downstairs guest room, and coordinate the laborious move. Since they were not permitted to travel on the interstate and it was difficult

to fit under bridges, the transport took more than four hours and required that the house cross three county lines. Sasha Berghausen, the project designer at Cassilly's firm, accompanied the home on its journey. "It was amazing seeing the movers winch telephone poles out of the way," he recalls. The house withstood the move in perfect condition, with all its enormous windows intact.

The carport and workroom were quickly converted into a guest suite. The 1970s deck and sliding-glass doors were replaced with historically accurate fixtures. Much of the original furniture—by the likes of Eames, Knoll, and Platner—was restored and remains in the house today. In 2004, the house was listed individually on the National Register of Historic Places.

"Matsumoto's design deserves the credit," DeFeo says. "Mid-century architecture has a very appealing, common-sense design. It's a simpler style." Thanks to his appreciation of the era and his willingness to look beyond the easiest solutions, DeFeo and his team preserved a home that could easily have been lost. ▶

After traveling 24 miles to a rural tract in Bahama, North Carolina, the Poland/DeFeo house is restored to its bucolic beginnings, buffered by woods, a horse pasture, and a reservoir.



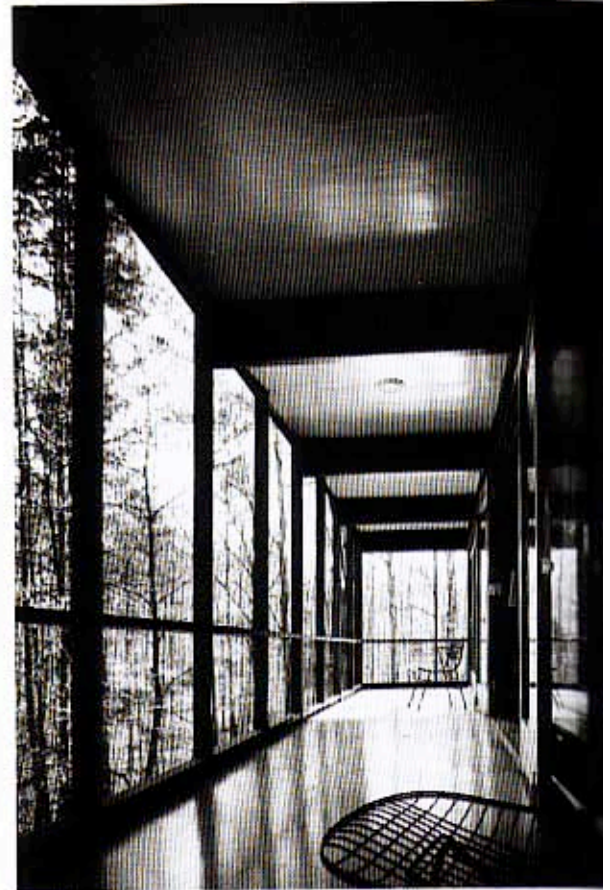
Lipman Residence



Thrower Residence, Interior



Thrower Residence



Milton Julian Residence

Ten Things You Should Know About George Matsumoto

- 1 / Born in 1922, Matsumoto studied architecture at the University of California, Berkeley until he was sent to an internment camp during World War II.
- 2 / He completed his degree at Washington University in St. Louis, which Matsumoto claims was one of only two universities in the United States to enroll Japanese-Americans at the time (the other was Harvard).
- 3 / He received his master's degree with honors from the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, where he studied under architect Eliel Saarinen.
- 4 / Matsumoto was influenced by the likes of Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Eduardo Catalano, and R. Buckminster Fuller, all of whom visited or taught at North Carolina State University School of Design between 1949 and 1960.
- 5 / In 1951, he married Kimi Nao, whom he had known since kindergarten. She passed away this year at age 82.
- 6 / One of Matsumoto's clients, the Julian family, had to go all the way to the North Carolina Supreme Court to get their neighborhood to approve Matsumoto's design. They were ultimately successful, and later named their daughter Kimi after Mrs. Matsumoto.
- 7 / If not for civil engineer and contractor Frank Walsler, Matsumoto would have had trouble finding someone who could build his early designs, since post-and-beam construction was revolutionary in North Carolina in the 1940s and '50s. Walsler's son, Bern, repaired the exterior of the Poland house during its rehabilitation.
- 8 / When DeFeo met Matsumoto in 2001, the architect was able to sketch the Poland house from memory on a napkin, 47 years after designing it.
- 9 / After moving to California, Matsumoto accepted only commercial commissions. He told DeFeo that he preferred commercial

work because with residences he had to "deal with the wives."

- 10 / In 1973, Matsumoto was inducted into the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects. He is now retired and lives in California. ■

