

8 TRAITS OF MID CENTURY MODERN DESIGN

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Mid-Century modern, often shortened to MCM, is an architectural and product design style that came to prominence roughly between World War I and the 1970's. It was a time when many American architects were looking ahead for ideas rather than over their shoulders. Designers were inspired by a collective optimism that embraced innovation and the achievements of the industrial revolution.

MCM homes open to their surroundings and foster a connection through generous window openings and projecting overhangs. This openness demonstrates an appreciation of nature that is also reflected in the use of natural materials like stone and wood. At times this natural appreciation is expressed through contrast with newer materials such as plastic, aluminum, and steel.

Mid-Century modern design is inherently democratic, with an emphasis on targeting the needs of average Americans living in post war America. For this reason function and form were equally important.

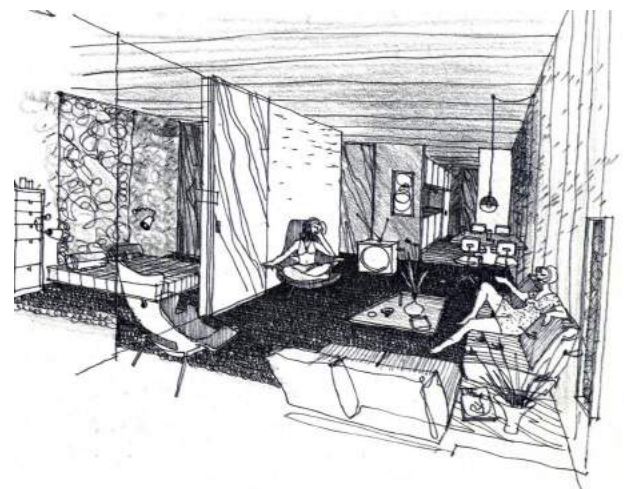
The features of Mid Century Design are traits applicable to good design of any era.



1. **Geometric Shapes.** House shapes are based on simple geometric forms, often boxes, or linked boxes. Materials are used in well-defined planes and vertical forms juxtaposed against horizontal elements for dramatic effect. Windows that follow a sloping roof echo it's simple geometry.



2. **Low, horizontal massing.** MCM homes are often a one story ranch with a flat roofs, broad roof overhangs, and an emphasis on horizontal planes. Their horizontality manifests their connection to the earth.
3. **Open, flowing interior spaces.** Living, dining and kitchen spaces flow together as part of one contiguous interior space reflecting a more casual way of life. Architectural elements that don't touch the ceiling allow for the partitioning of spaces that require privacy while maintaining this spirit of openness. These elements could be screens, cabinets or panels that frame views while concealing other areas.





4. **Indoor and outdoor experiences.** Many times the approach to an MCM home leads you to an entryway that is solid and private. As you make your way through the home the interior becomes increasingly transparent, until you reach a common area, such as the living room, where the interiors open to the landscape and view. Large sections of windows or glass doors enable a free flow of air and light. This orchestrated sequence of experiences accomplishes several things; it maintains the privacy of the home toward the street, it creates a pleasurable experience moving through the spaces, and it rewards the viewer with a delightful view at the end. In some houses, stone accent walls or water features appear to pass from inside through the exterior wall of the house visually illustrating the connection to nature that has inspired the designers.



5. **Natural Materials.** The natural beauty of a material is allowed to speak for itself. Wood, stained rather than painted, expresses its natural character. Exposed wood beams and wood ceilings are common. In many cases exterior wood is also stained. Stone walls, stone walkways, and brick floors are common, though used in simplified way.



6. **Generous use of glass and natural light.** MCM homes have lots of windows that are treated as a material from which to compose an enclosure rather than merely a hole punched in a wall. They are placed with consideration of privacy from the street and to emphasize a view of the gardens or landscape in the back. Clerestory windows, located high on the wall, just below the roofline, are a common feature of MCM houses. Windows are no longer portholes to the outside, but large expanses of floor to ceiling glass providing dramatic views and introducing natural light deep into the interior of homes.

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- 7. Absence of ornament.** You do not see a lot of profiled trim in an MCM house. Ornamentation is avoided because it is thought to detract from the beauty of a simplified form. Decorative moldings and elaborate trim are eliminated or greatly simplified, giving way to a clean aesthetic where materials meet in simple, well-executed joints.



Mid-century modern homes can have a positive impact on the way you feel. Light-filled, open spaces are energizing. Open living spaces provide opportunities for interaction with other people, enabling family conversation and entertaining opportunities. Bringing nature indoors through texture and a connection to outdoor spaces creates a calming environment for relaxation.

- 8. Innovative use of materials and systems.** MCM designers experimented with newly developed, sometimes fragile, materials such as plastic, plywood and fiberglass. Structural systems of wood timbers or steel are exposed to view and treated as both decoration and structure. Glass is available in larger dimensions allowing expansive openings. Often exteriors are wrapped in simple board cladding. When traditional materials, such as brick and stone, are used, they are detailed as simple, unornamented masses and planes.

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